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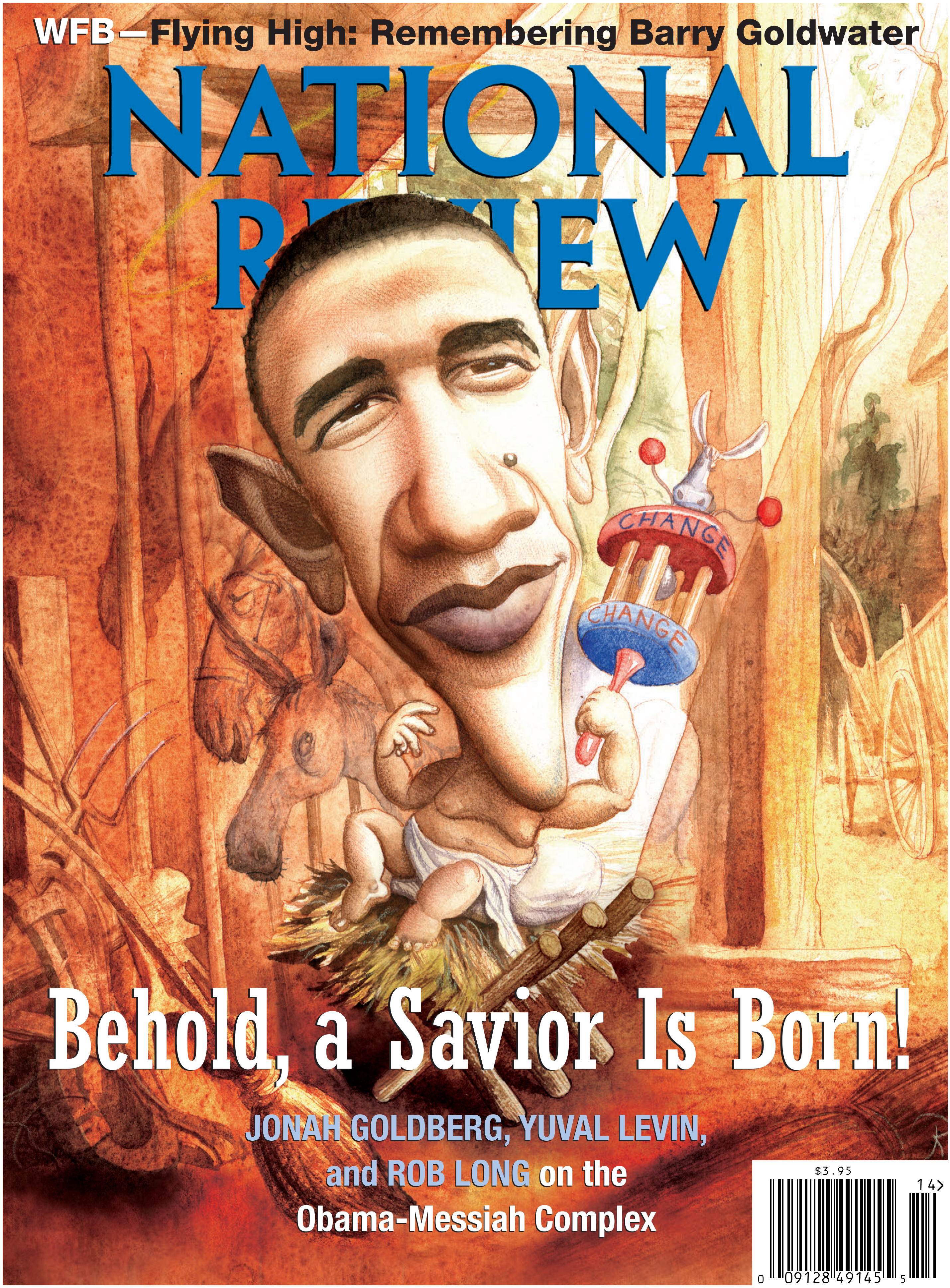

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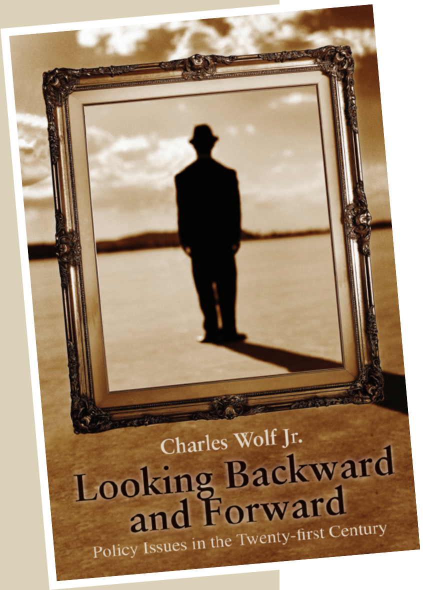
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APRIL 7, 2008 VOL. LX, NO. 6

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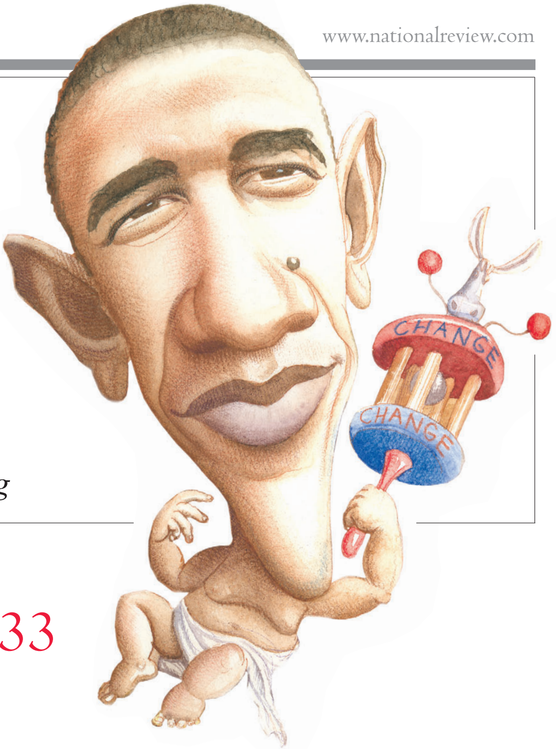
■ ON THE COVER

The Limits of Hope

Obama, we're told, is "the agent of transformation in an age of revolution." He doesn't just know the truth, he knows "how to be the truth." His words do not inform, they "elevate." He is "the triumph of word over flesh, over color, over despair." Creepy? Yes. Unprecedented? No. *By Jonah Goldberg*



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National Review (ISSN: 0028-0038) is published bi-weekly, except for the first issue in January, by National Review, Inc., at 215 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. ©National Review, Inc., 2008. Address all editorial mail, manuscripts, letters to the editor, etc., to Editorial Dept., National Review, 215 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016. Address all subscription mail orders, changes of address, undeliverable copies, etc., to National Review, Circulation Dept., P. O. Box 668, Mount Morris, Ill. 61054-0668; phone, 815-734-1232, Monday–Friday, 8:00 A.M. to 10:30 P.M. Eastern time. Adjustment requests should be accompanied by a current mailing label or facsimile. Direct classified advertising inquiries to: Classifieds Dept., National Review, 215 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016 or call 212-679-7330. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to National Review, Circulation Dept., P. O. Box 668, Mount Morris, Ill. 61054-0668. Printed in the U.S.A.

RATES: $59.00 a year (24 issues). Add $21.50 for Canada and other foreign subscriptions, per year. (All payments in U.S. currency.) The editors cannot be responsible for unsolicited manuscripts or artwork unless return postage or, better, a stamped self-addressed envelope is enclosed. Opinions expressed in signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the editors.

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April 7 issue; printed March 20

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letters to the editor

HEAVENLY DICTION

In response to William F. Buckley's death, you write, "Let's pray they have a dictionary in Heaven" ("The Week," March 24). With respect, the Lord God has no need of one—he invented them. Did he not call his eternally begotten son "the Word"? Mr. Buckley will matriculate in vocabulary lessons of an even higher order.

Rev. James T. Dennison Jr.
Lynnwood, Wash.

REPLACE A HYMEN, SAVE A LIFE

In his February 25 column, Mark Steyn notes—flippantly—that the British National Health Service now funds hymen replacements for young Muslim women ("Would You Like a Hymen with That?"). He quotes an "expert" as saying that, without these replacements, young women would be "rejected if it is found out that they are not virgins."

A better way of putting it is that they might be killed. "Honor killings"—the euphemistic name for such murders—are woefully common. A teenage girl whose hymen is torn (whether from falling off a bike or, as Mr. Steyn puts it, from engaging in Britney-on-a-Saturday-night-bender activities) is at grave risk in conservative Islamic cultures and subcultures.

In his column, Mr. Steyn is primarily concerned with documenting the demographic shifts of which taxpayer-funded hymen replacements—and many other things—are evidence. He does not say whether such policies ought to be immediately discontinued. But precisely what is at stake should be clearly expressed.

Danielle Ensign
Los Angeles, Calif.

NATIONAL REVIEW encourages letters to the editor. Letters can be submitted by e-mail to letters@nationalreview.com. Please include your full name, address, and daytime phone number. Letters will be edited for space and clarity.

ENOUGH ABOUT "EQUALITY"

In "A More Equal Capitalism" (February 25) Jim Manzi offers many sensible recommendations. But I scratched my head over his claims about equality. He argues that "if inequality becomes sufficiently extreme it undermines the social support required for a democratic and capitalist society to flourish." In the same paragraph, however, he tells us that the United States is "nowhere near" this pass. He also gives us no reason to think we'll be there soon. So why the alarm?

More generally: *Any* distribution of wealth will change over time so long as people are 1) free, 2) unequally talented, and 3) unequally lucky. It is by no means obvious that policymakers should intervene, perforce coercively, to separate persons from the consequences of their choices. What is obvious—to me, at least—is that persons should be treated equally before the law. That view cannot be reconciled with the idea that wealth inequality *as such* is objectionable. Mr. Manzi stops short of endorsing this idea, but his analysis is the weaker for its failure to recognize that, as soon as a free society attains his desired level of equality, it will get back to the work of getting unequal.

Jonas Trosset
Big Piney, Wyo.

CORRECTIONS

In our March 10 issue, the poem "You Are Not Other Men" was identified as the work of Robert Mezey. It is actually Mr. Mezey's translation of a poem by Jorge Luis Borges.

Additionally, our March 24 issue misspelled Danilo Petranovich's name as "Danillo Petronovich."

We regret the errors.

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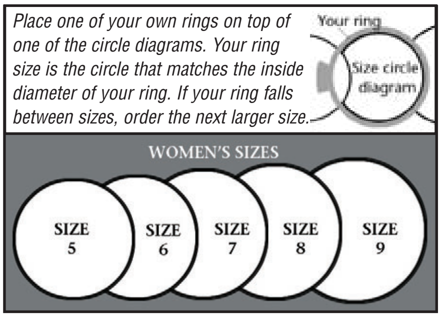

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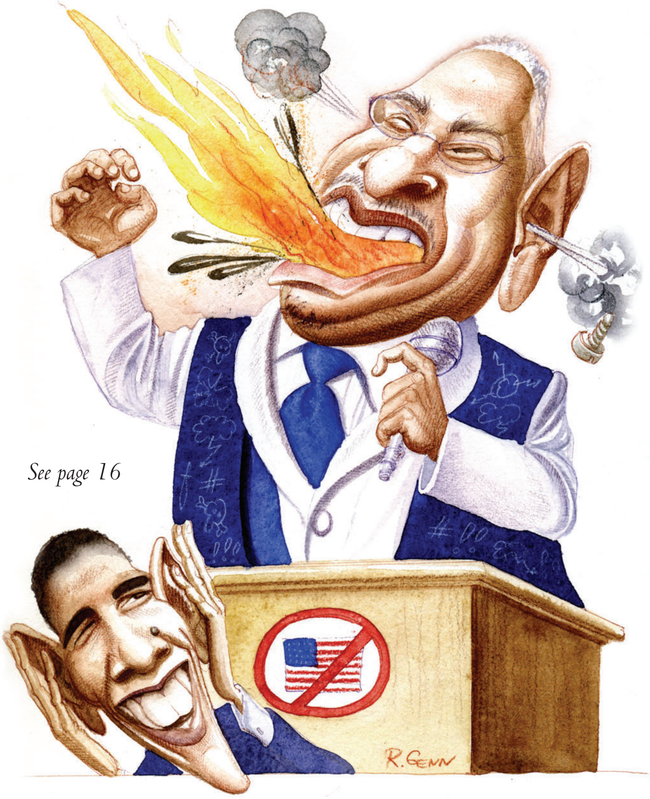
THE WEEK



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ROMAN GENN

■ On the bright side, he didn't invest that $80,000 in Bear Stearns.

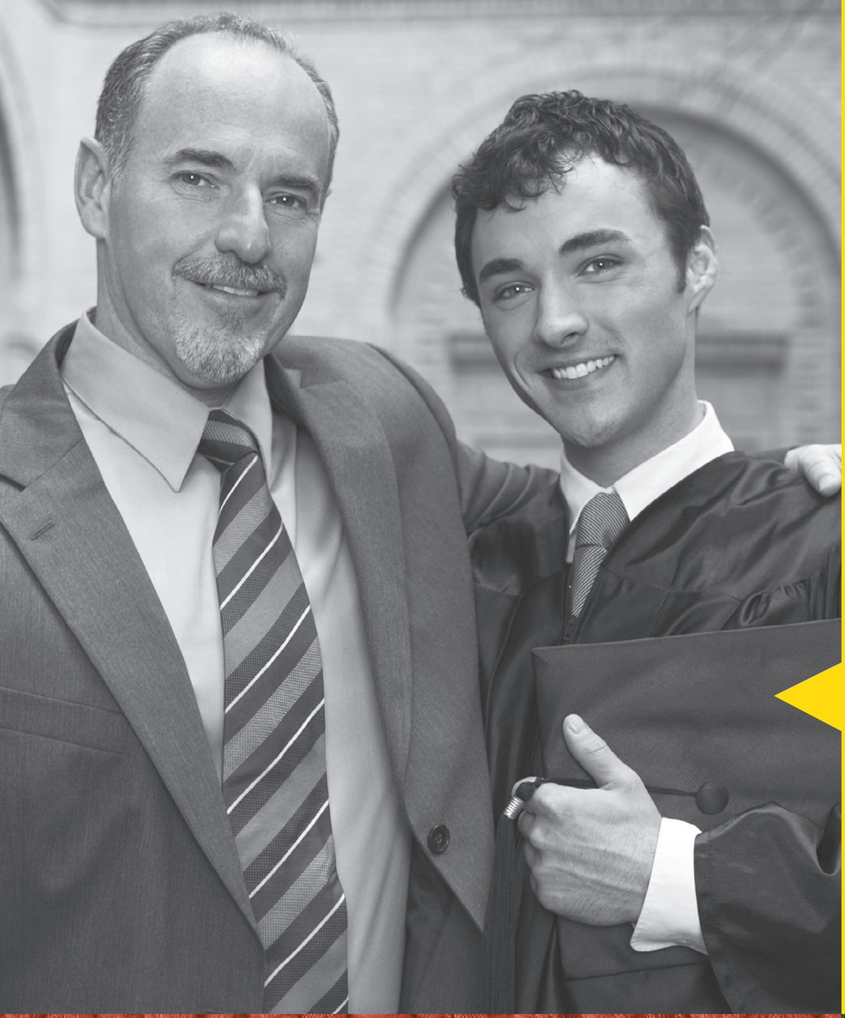
■ John McCain won the Republican presidential primaries by running as a pro-life Reagan Republican, committed to low taxes and a strong defense. We assume that he will therefore pick a running mate who shares these views and whom conservatives can eagerly support. We assume, as well, that he is more interested in winning the White House than in redefining the Republican party, and will not try to make the party platform reflect each of his views. Should McCain's judgment err in these respects, however, conservatives will not be powerless. Securing the vice-presidential nomination requires a majority of delegates to the party convention, and those delegates can abstain. A majority of the delegates from any six states can nominate someone else, and can also contest portions of the platform. Most conservatives are willing to support McCain this fall, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, and are also willing to work with him before and after the election. But conservatives are not, and should not be, willing to go along with McCain no matter what. Delegates should be prepared to stand for their principles, and the party's future.

■ A gaffe, Michael Kinsley taught us, is not saying something false, but saying something true that no one wishes to acknowledge. Former vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro, who now backs Hillary Clinton, said: "If Obama was a white man, he would not be in this position. . . . The country is caught up in the concept." Outrage from the candidate and his acolytes. "I don't think Geraldine Ferraro's comments have any place in our politics. . . . They are divisive" (Barack Obama). "When you wink and nod at offensive statements, you're really sending a signal to your supporters that anything goes" (Obama adviser David Axelrod). Ferraro made things even worse by saying, "If my name had been Gerald Ferraro . . . I would never have gotten nominated." No kidding. Ferraro was picked to Make History, as Hillary was supposed to Make History this year, except that Obama seems more Historical. Maybe the fracas reminded non-Democrats why they find the party so menacing: It is rigid as a faculty search committee, or a union grievance hearing, but with aspirations to spend your money.

■ The Democrats' difficulty in choosing a presidential nominee is the product of two characteristic decisions. In the name of fairness, they adopted proportional representation: none of the "winner take all" business that plutocratic Republicans favor, and that also tends to produce clear victors. Then, because they do not actually trust the voters to make the right call, the Democrats devised a clumsy fix to the problem they had created: The "superdelegates" would pick the nominee in a close race. But should the superdelegates ever make a difference—by providing a margin of victory for a candidate who is slightly behind among the "pledged" delegates, i.e., those whose votes are determined by the outcomes of state primaries and caucuses—they will be accused of ignoring the people. Perhaps they can get a court to sort it all out?

■ Former House speaker Denny Hastert stepped down from his seat in the middle of his term, and picked a weak candidate, dairy magnate Jim Oberweis, to run for it. Oberweis had already lost three statewide races in Illinois in this decade. Now he has lost a local race too, and a Democrat has picked up a seat that went 55 percent for Bush in 2004. The Illinois Republican party is in bad shape, and the national Republican party should be on notice that it has no margin to make mistakes.

■ Two years ago, Alaska's Sarah Palin came out of nowhere to swipe the GOP nomination from Frank Murkowski, the unpopular incumbent Republican governor. She went on to a general-election victory and is occasionally even discussed, in some circles, as vice-presidential material. Now her 2006 running mate, lieutenant governor Sean Parnell, has announced a primary challenge to Rep. Don Young, who has held the state's lone House seat for 18 terms. In that time, Young has become one of Washington's



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premier pork-barrel pols, most notably for his advocacy of the infamous "bridge to nowhere." Despite their self-image as rugged libertarians, Alaskans love federal handouts, and the 74-year-old Young hasn't faced a difficult reelection in some time. Yet he's also under an ethics probe involving earmarks, and has spent around $850,000 on legal bills. Many Republicans worry that if Young is their nominee once again he will lose the seat. Now they have a viable alternative in the August primary. Palin has endorsed Parnell. So should Alaska's conservatives.

■ Al-Qaeda trains its terrorists to resist known interrogation tactics, so the United States has a national-security interest in keeping such tactics secret. Congressional Democrats, however, tried to make the country's techniques quite literally an open book: They wanted to restrict interrogators to the practices approved in the Army Field Manual, a publicly available document. Fortunately, President Bush vetoed the bill. Democrats are pretending that he acted out of enthusiasm for waterboarding. But that is not the issue: While waterboarding is rough stuff, the United States has not used it in five years, and even then employed the technique on a grand total of three terrorists. Their colleagues should not know what to expect from our interrogators, even if we know all too well what to expect from the Democrats.

■ President Bush and our intelligence agencies want to go after terrorists abroad. The Democrats and their trial-lawyer partners seem as interested in going after American businesses that have cooperated in good faith with anti-terrorism operations. That's the short version of Nancy Pelosi's decision to stick the stiletto into a bipartisan bill—one supported by two-thirds of Senate *Democrats*—that would have restored our intelligence agencies' ability to monitor communications among foreign terrorism suspects operating outside of the United States. The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act was intended to protect Americans at home from being spied on by the government without a warrant. But an unnamed judge for a secret court issued an unpublished opinion extending FISA protections to Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, China—the whole planet. Republicans and responsible Democrats in Congress cooperated to reclaim our intelligence capabilities, but the bill they passed to do so, the Protect America Act, expired in February. Democrats in the House have refused to renew it unless congressional Republicans and the president agree to expose U.S. communications companies to billions of dollars in lawsuits for having cooperated with U.S. intelligence agencies in the wake of 9/11. As of this writing, a telephone call between Osama bin Laden and Moqtada al-Sadr, each in his Middle East hideout, enjoys the same protection as a call between a husband and wife in Topeka. That's national defense, Pelosi-style.

■ Adm. William Fallon resigned as head of U.S. Central Command, having served less than a year in the post with responsibility for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He explained, "The current embarrassing situation, public perception of differences between my views and administration policy and the distraction this causes from the mission make this the right thing to do." He neglected only to mention that this public perception is the result of his own improper statements. He was consistently at odds with General Petraeus over troop reductions in Iraq, and a recent *Esquire* profile of the admiral depicted him as "brazenly challenging" his commander in chief. The administration says that "all options are on the table" with Iran, but Fallon told the *Financial Times* that military action was not "in the offing. Another war is not where we want to go." A CENTCOM commander is expected to support both his commanders in the field and his commander in chief; Fallon preferred to freelance on foreign policy, which he may now do in retirement.

■ For all their happy talk about improving diplomatic relations with America's traditional allies, Democrats didn't hesitate to go ballistic after the Pentagon awarded a big contract for Air Force refueling tankers to Northrop Grumman and a European partner rather than to Boeing. Hillary Clinton complained of outsourcing and Barack Obama expressed surprise that "an American company . . . would not have done this job." Yet Air Force officials insist that the KC-45A, based on the Airbus A330, is the best choice for the military. Air Force acquisition chief Sue Payton, dragged up to Capitol Hill for a grilling, told lawmakers that the joint U.S.-European bid provided "the best overall value to the warfighter and to every American taxpayer." Some Democrats would like to blame the result on John McCain. Several years ago, he called attention to illegal contacts between the Air Force and Boeing, which led to the imprisonment of two people and the resignation of Boeing's CEO. It also opened the door for a company other than Boeing to win the new contract. Democrats apparently think McCain shouldn't have sniffed out corruption. "We are sending the jobs overseas, all because John McCain demanded it," grumbled Rep. Rahm Emanuel of Illinois. McCain is rightly sticking to his guns. "I've always felt that the best thing to do is to create the best weapons system we can at a minimum cost to taxpayers," he recently said. That's a good principle. Unfortunately, many of his critics abide by a different one: It's okay to have a competition until the other side wins.

■ This year's budget battles will look similar to last year's. Once again, the most pressing concern will be funding the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The war supplemental will again be unpopular with both parties. Republicans and conservative Democrats will resist the timetables for withdrawal that Pelosi and Harry Reid will inevitably attempt to incorporate into the bill, whereas white-flag Democrats will not want to authorize another dime for the war under any conditions. The Democratic leadership will try to buy votes from these recalcitrant constituencies by adding unrelated spending to the supplementals. Thus, conservatives' most important objective in this fight will be to make sure that military commanders have everything they need to prosecute the wars successfully, but a secondary objective will be to keep the Democrats from using troops as pack mules for pork. A longer-term concern, for the second year in a row, is that the Democrats have put forward a five-year budget proposal that assumes the expiration of the Bush tax cuts. Allowing rates to snap back to their previous levels would raise taxes by two-thirds of $1 trillion, which would be the largest tax increase in American history. Some kinds of "change" we don't need.

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THE WEEK...

■ Democrats are facing a party litmus test on immigration. Freshman Democratic congressman Heath Shuler has authored a piece of legislation known as the SAVE Act, which would add 8,000 border-patrol agents and within four years mandate that businesses use a government program to verify the legality of their employees. The Democratic House leadership is sitting on the bill, which would probably pass with the support of a minority of House Democrats. So Republicans filed a "discharge petition"—a procedural move to force a floor vote—on the act. In the week before Congress headed out for its recess, the petition received 181 signatures of the 218 it needs. Let's see how far the Democratic leadership is willing to go to keep a majority of the House from doing something the public wants.

■ "Protest—[the] peaceful way [to] express their deep resentment—is a right," said the Dalai Lama, after protests in his native Tibet left 80 dead (China put the death toll at 16). Peaceful protest may be a right in nature, and in the eye of nature's God, but it is not recognized in China. Tibetans chafe at years of Sinification—"Some kind of cultural genocide is taking place," the Dalai Lama said—and see this summer's Beijing Olympics as a chance to place their grievances before the world. Chinese authorities try to manage the crisis, torn between their impulses and their desire to cut an attractive figure. The Olympics, which follow scandals about shoddy Chinese exports and which have already produced stories about Beijing's pollution, look to be a PR debacle. They will surely be one if a large number of foreign dignitaries boycott the opening ceremony in protest, as they have threatened to do, and as they should. China, Tibet, and the Tibetan diaspora look forward to a long hot summer.

■ China's "liberalized" economy allows some market mechanisms to operate, but it is still dominated by the corrupt leadership of the People's Liberation Army and various tentacles of the Communist Party. So investors must have been scratching their

‘Govern Me!’ He Cried

ALEX WONG/GETTYNEWSCOM

‘NEVER do I want to hear again from my conservative friends about how brilliant capitalists are . . . and how government should keep its hands off the private economy." So proclaimed the *Washington Post*'s E. J. Dionne in near-ecstatic schadenfreude over the current credit crisis.

"The Wall Street titans have turned into a bunch of welfare clients," he cackles. "They are desperate to be bailed out by government from their own incompetence, and from the deregulatory regime for which they lobbied so hard. . . . Enter the federal government, the institution to which the wealthy are not supposed to pay capital gains or inheritance taxes. Good God, you don't expect these people to trade in their BMWs for Saturns, do you?"

Renowned philosopher William Cohen—also known as a former liberal-Republican senator from Maine—gets to the heart of it for Dionne: "We have been saying for so long that government is the enemy. Government is the enemy until you need a friend."

Well, maybe. But for Dionne and countless others, the fact that we need the government in an emergency seems to imply that the government can act like the Friend Who Won't Leave (anyone remember that *Saturday Night Live* skit?). Dionne and those like him greet every calamity not as a narrow justification for limited action, but as a sweeping writ for permanent intervention.

Consider 9/11. In its immediate aftermath, liberal intellectuals rushed to the scene like ambulance chasers to proclaim that their client—the government—had been vindicated. "This catastrophe has reminded us of a basic truth at the heart of our democracy," Bill Moyers wrote at the time. "No matter our wealth or status or faith, we are all equal before the law, in the voting booth, and when death rains down from the sky." And that's why—don't laugh—we need single-payer health care. Sen. Chuck Schumer wrote an op-ed for the *Washington Post* titled "Big Government Looks Better Now," in which he argued that 9/11 proved the need for a "'new' New Deal." A "news analysis" in the *New York Times* proclaimed that "big government is back in style."

No doubt Mr. Dionne skipped to work that day.

And now the same thing is happening with the financial crisis. The more I watch liberals watch events on Wall Street, the more I think they resemble my dog when I take the can opener to his breakfast tin. It's a mixture of pent-up desire and salivating impatience. They seem to be thinking, "If only things *really* go down the toilet, all objections to Big Government and new New Deals will go down with them!"

So now wouldn't be a bad time to recall how often government fails. The Tuskegee experiment, a publicly funded endeavor of progressive intellectuals, withheld treatment from blacks with syphilis. The New Deal prolonged the Great Depression by nearly a decade. Welfare destroyed inner cities. The Warren Court sent crime through the roof. And so on. Should we not say to E. J. Dionne: "Never do we want to hear again from our liberal friends how wonderful government is"?

—JONAH GOLDBERG

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heads when they read that Shanghai-based Industrial Fund Management has received government permission to launch China's first "socially responsible" mutual fund. Where will they invest? Taiwan?

■ The Cuban government sent a soccer team to Florida. Seven members of that team promptly sought asylum. Cubans tend to do this, when they get a chance. They can't vote in free elections at home, so they vote with their feet. They vote when they head out into shark-infested waters, risking death. How do the many apologists for Cuban Communism account for this? They don't, really. They just bluster and accuse. The totalitarian nature of Cuban society is shamefully undernoticed. By the way, years ago, a Cuban ballet troupe came to New York. And, as someone remarked, they all defected, "including the swan."

ISSOUF SANOGO/AFP/GETTY

■ Charles Taylor, president of Liberia from 1997 to 2003, is on trial for war crimes before a U.N. special court sitting in The Hague. Some of the testimony has been very gruesome. A certain Joseph "Zigzag" Marzah, for instance, who identified himself to the court as Taylor's chief of operations, testified that on Taylor's orders his unit killed and ate enemy soldiers. Asked by defense counsel how he prepared these vittles for the table, Mr. Marzah gave complete recommendations for butchering (you throw away the head), cleaning, and cooking (lots of salt and pepper). The comestibles included troops from the West African ECOMOG peacekeeping force, and also some U.N. peacekeepers, though in a qualification worthy of the Monty Python team Mr. Marzah insisted that "not many" peacekeepers were eaten. As there is honor among thieves, apparently there is moral restraint even among cannibals.

■ Cherish the name of Wafa Sultan, follow what this lady says and does: She's a true fighter for freedom. Originally from Syria, and a Sunni Muslim, she is now a psychiatrist in California, thus perfectly placed to assess both the world of Islam and the West. Appearing on al-Jazeera in 2006, she exposed and shredded the prejudices of an Islamist sheikh. Now she's done it again—and again on al-Jazeera. True, the Egyptian Islamist opposite her this time was pretty low-caliber, but millions of Arabs and Muslims will have heard her tell him that "any belief that chops off the heads of its critics is doomed to turn into terrorism and tyranny." Muslims, she went on, must learn how to listen to the criticism of others, and if they want respect they must teach their children "love, peace, coexistence, and productive work." Wafa Sultan is an individual, with nothing but intellect and courage to back her up, but it will take the likes of her to change the terms of debate about Islam and terrorism.

■ When the city council of Berkeley, Calif., declared Marine Corps recruiters unwelcome, the resolution attracted much criticism, and rightly so. Yet there are even worse ways to propound such views, one of which was recently on display when the military recruiting office in Times Square was bombed in the middle of the night. Nobody was hurt, and the damage was soon repaired, but anyone who works in or visits the office must now worry about a repeat. This was not an isolated occurrence: Michelle Malkin has listed nearly two dozen acts of violence against military recruiters in the last five years. Perhaps the Left will take these attacks seriously if we call them hate crimes.

■ When the United Methodist Church kicks off its general assembly this month, one of the notable items on its agenda will be a vote on economic sanctions against Israel. Notwithstanding the abundance of cruel despots who have come and gone during the lifetime of their church, Methodists have not found an opportunity to mete out similar punishment against any other government: not Castro's Cuba, the embargo against which they have lobbied to end, nor the prison-state of North Korea, where the lunatic regime of Kim Jong Il is succored by Methodist "humanitarian aid." The Methodists never even found time for a boycott of those states where it was a capital offense to be a Methodist: the Soviet Union, for example, or Pol Pot's Cambodia. One Methodist publication goes so far as to make a grotesque and unconscionable comparison between democratic Israel and Nazi Germany. Methodist literature has also referred to Israel's founding as "original sin." This rhetorical gambit concentrates the Methodists' objections to Israel, which are: 1) that it exists; 2) that it intends to continue existing.

■ Clever marketers have long understood that the more something costs, the better people assume it must be. For an example of one such customer, look no farther than Eliot Spitzer. Now researchers from Duke and MIT have found that the placebo effect, in which an inert substance can heal patients who are told the substance is medicine, is increased if patients think the medicine is expensive. When experimental subjects were told the sugar pill they took was a new analgesic that cost 10 cents, they reported a decrease in pain 61 percent of the time. When told it cost $2.50, the figure was 85 percent. These results suggest that Canada does its citizens no favor by controlling drug prices. The researchers offer various policy implications from their findings, but we suspect these will be ignored. The most likely result of the study is rather an increase in price supports for sugar.

■ An eighth-grader in New Haven, Conn., was suspended when one of his classmates sold him a pack of Skittles, the bright-colored, fruit-flavored, endlessly delicious candy. The lad was further stripped of the title of class vice president and told he couldn't attend an honors dinner at the school. His dealer was also punished with a suspension. What was it that outraged the school authorities—that a commercial transaction had taken place, or the nature of the goods involved? The latter, apparently. A spokesnanny for the New Haven school system explained that candy sales are forbidden as part of a district-wide school wellness policy. That this draconian micro-managing of a

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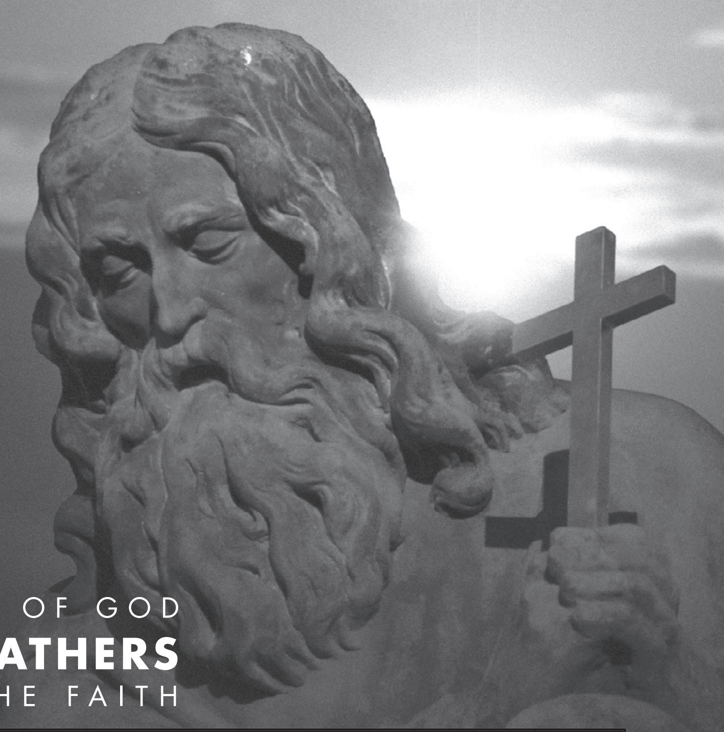

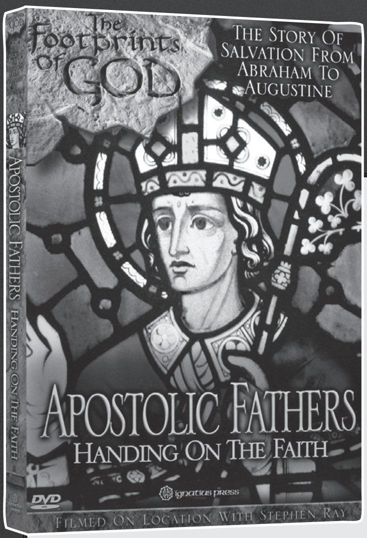
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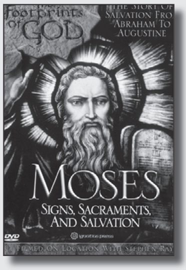
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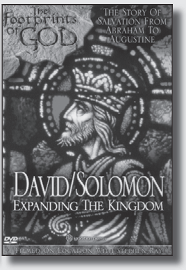
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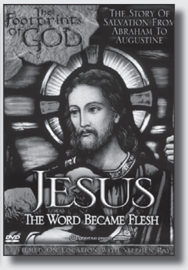
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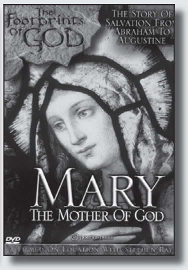
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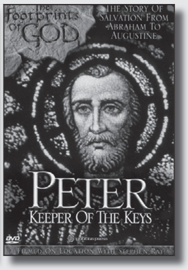
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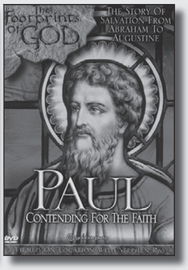
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student's life might be as harmful to his liberty, not to mention his sense of proportion, as candy is to his body, seems not to have occurred to the school bureaucrats.

■ One of the more amusing features of campaign-finance transparency is that it reveals the political biases of our nation's higher-education institutions. "All Princeton faculty members who have given to 2008 presidential candidates so far have donated to Democrats, according to federal records of donations to presidential campaigns from Princeton University employees," the *Daily Princetonian* reported recently. The professors' favorite was, well, we'll let you guess.

■ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry was the French answer to Charles Lindbergh, a pilot whose feats became so legendary that he was known familiarly as Saint-Ex. As a young man between the wars, he flew the mails across the French empire, survived a crash in the Sahara, and celebrated the joy and freedom of the air in a rapturous literary style all his own. A patriot through and through, he fought in the French air force, took the defeat of 1940 very hard, and left an account of his experiences as a combat pilot. For a while afterward, he was in New York, where he wrote *The Little Prince*, a wonderful fable of innocence and hope that has sold more than 50 million copies. Rejoining his squadron in Algeria, he disappeared without trace on a reconnaissance mission over the Mediterranean. A book just published in Paris solves the mystery. A former Messerschmitt pilot, Horst Rippert, now 88, believes he shot down that reconnaissance plane. Like others, he had been inspired to fly by his victim's books, and says ruefully, "If I had known that it was him, I'd never have fired." It's a fitting coda to the Saint-Ex legend.

■ Playwright David Mamet wrote an election-season piece for the *Village Voice*, provocatively titled "Why I Am No Longer a 'Brain-Dead Liberal.'" "Brain-dead liberal" was the moniker he had been applying to himself in interior monologues—even as he thought of NPR as "National Palestinian Radio." America's social classes, he now realized, were "mobile, not static, [the latter of] which is the Marxist view." He found himself reading Thomas Sowell, "our greatest contemporary philosopher." The upshot? Mamet used to hold two contradictory views of America. "One was of a state where everything was magically wrong and must be immediately corrected at any cost." The other was of "the world in which I actually functioned day to day . . . made up of people, most of whom were reasonably trying to maximize their comfort by getting along with each other." So he decided to cast off the first, and embrace the second. There are second acts, it seems, in American minds.

■ Is Prospect Bend, Fla., ready for democracy? Perhaps not. A March 11 referendum was held to decide whether the unincorporated community would be merged with neighboring Tamarac. Government officials, worried that Prospect Bend's population of renters would be too apathetic to turn out, notified each of the community's 68 registered voters of the great question before them—but to no avail, for not a single voter showed up at the polls. At an estimated cost of $2,500, the Broward County supervisor of elections supervised a scoreless tie; immediately afterward, we understand, Hillary Clinton claimed victory.

■ In 1957, Arthur C. Clarke wrote a short story in which an astronaut on an orbiting space station happens to glimpse the dead wreckage of an alien spacecraft pass by. Nobody else sees the wreck and there is no chance the astronaut will see it again. The story encapsulates Clarke's science fiction: He loved outer space, and longed to be there; he dreamed of other civilizations in the universe, and wondered how we would encounter them; and he had a scientist's respect for evidence, weaving his fiction only from what is known or can be credibly speculated. Kingsley Amis said that the goal of a science fiction story is "to arouse wonder, terror, and excitement." Few writers attained that goal more often or more consistently than Clarke; few had as long a career, from his first paid story in 1945 to a 2007 novel (co-authored). In 1956 Clarke moved from his native England to Sri Lanka in order to spend his free time scuba diving, the closest he could get to the silence, weightlessness, and mystery of the great void. Arthur C. Clarke died in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on March 19. R.I.P.

THE ECONOMY

Averting a Crisis

THE journalistic consensus of the moment is that we are in the middle of an economic crisis. But it is not clear that we are even in a recession. It is worth remembering that financial commentators have predicted ten of the last four recessions. In the winter of 1995–96, the chatter was about downsizing. Republican politicians accused President Clinton of causing a "middle-class crunch." In 1998 the worry was about "Asian contagion" spreading to our financial markets, and the federal bailout for the hedge fund Long Term Capital Management was supposedly a sign of troubles to come.

The price of housing has been flat or dropping for a year now, and the economy has kept growing. The last few months' worth of jobs numbers have been disappointing, and probably mean that we are having sluggish growth. But the numbers were just as bad in early 2003, and they did not signal a recession then.

The housing bust is in part the result of misguided government policies. Restrictions on homebuilding have made the market less responsive to price signals, and thus more volatile. The Federal Reserve, by keeping monetary policy too loose during the boom, encouraged inflation in that market.

We understand that politicians feel the need to "do something." But what they most need to do is get out of the way of a market adjustment. Housing prices need to fall far enough for

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people to start buying again. People who cannot afford to own homes should go back to renting.

The Federal Reserve, too, should be careful not to make things worse. It loaned the money for J. P. Morgan Chase to buy out the brokerage house Bear Stearns. That intervention may have made sense as a way of stopping a panic-driven run on Bear Stearns. The Fed's new "lending facility" will be worthwhile only on two conditions: that it be used sparingly and temporarily, and that it serve as a substitute for the ever-looser monetary policy that Wall Street has been demanding for the last year.

The Fed's defenders argue that it makes no sense to tighten money just because oil prices are rising, and they have a point. But it is time to announce that the Fed is not going to loosen money any further. Just as homebuyers need to see that housing prices have hit bottom, so do would-be borrowers need to know that interest rates are not going to be driven yet lower.

Republican politicians should meanwhile avoid the temptation to lean on the Fed to pump up growth this year at the cost of inflation in years to come. If the Fed inflates the currency and Democrats allow a tax increase, we will be back to the unhappy policy mix of the 1970s, the one that produced the stagflation of that era. Republicans ought to be guarding against that possibility and standing instead for growth.

But that is only half their job. Much of the country thought we were in a recession even when the economic indicators showed that growth was strong. Wages have been flat during this boom, a victim of rising health-care costs. The extra cost has not bought improved security. Republicans have policies that can address the public's anxieties. They will have to talk about them day in and day out, recession or no recession.

AT WAR

Five Years Later

THE horrors and disappointments of the war in Iraq should not make us forget how dangerous an Iraq with Saddam Hussein still in power would be.

One of the modern world's cruelest and most repressive dictators, Saddam remained determined to reconstitute his weapons programs. His ambition to obtain nuclear weapons would have grown all the more ardent, surely, as Iran got closer to a bomb. Five more years of sanctions—and periodic bombing—might have kept him at bay (and continued to immiserate the Iraqi people). But the sanctions were already loosening, and Saddam had become adept at cheating the system. He would have remained in power, a committed enemy of the United States, a threat to our allies, a tormentor of Iraqis, a supporter of radicalism, and a reckless gambler possessed of hegemonic ambitions in one of the world's most important regions. And, on top of all this, a friend to terrorists: A new report by the Institute for Defense Analyses details how Saddam supported Qaeda-affiliated terror groups such as Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

It is good for us, for the region, and for Iraqis that Saddam is gone. But the good wrought by the invasion has been undercut by the botched occupation and the predations of our enemies. For many Iraqis, the American occupation has been a cataclysm. Tens of thousands have died, and 4 million have been displaced. In the annus horribilis of 2006, a civil war threatened to spin out of control. The chaos has, for the time being, discredited democracy in the region, and until the last year al-Qaeda had established direct control over portions of Iraq.

The surge pulled Iraq back from the brink. Iraqis might not be prepared for liberal democracy, but neither do they relish violence and the rule of fanatics. Across the country, they have risen to work with American forces newly committed to protecting them, bringing stability to areas long beset by sectarian warfare and controlled by extremists. Some 80,000 Sunnis have become security volunteers patrolling their neighborhoods. Realizing that the political wind is blowing against violence, Moqtada al-Sadr first declared and then extended a ceasefire. Intercepted communications from al-Qaeda constantly tell of its distressed state: Its fighters have been killed, it has been driven from one area to another, and the Sunni population has turned against it.

Across the country, violence has declined to 2005 levels, leaving Iraq a dangerous place but one that is no longer self-immolating. Top American officers fear, however, that they will not be able to reduce the violence much more without substantial political progress. There have been signs that ice is beginning to break in the legislature. De-Baathification and amnesty laws, though flawed, have passed. The most important remaining objective is to hold provincial elections. Most Sunnis boycotted the 2005 elections and got shut out of the government as a result. Elections in the provinces would allow forward-looking Sunnis to acquire a political voice. A bill to hold them by October 1 passed the legislature, but it has been blocked for now in Iraq's presidency council.

In 2006, the Bush administration and many conservatives were unable to see conditions in Iraq for what they were. They also were unable to budge from their favored policy (a "light footprint," "quick turnover to the Iraqis" approach). But since the beginning of the surge, it has been the Democrats who have been determinedly detached from reality. They insist on quickly withdrawing U.S. troops, and often say that doing so will improve conditions on the ground because Iraqis will finally feel the need to sort out their own problems. This is nonsense. No one in Iraq, either in the U.S. command or in the Iraqi government, believes it to be true.

Even top-level Democrats in the Obama and Clinton campaigns apparently realize the foolishness of this position. Prior to her departure from the Obama campaign, foreign-policy analyst Samantha Power told the BBC that, once elected, Obama would disregard his campaign rhetoric and work with commanders on the ground to formulate a realistic plan. This was comforting, although it would be better if the candidate were honest now, and not so set on selling the public a plan to lose the war. But even this comfort was short-lived: Since the Power interview, Obama's campaign has been insisting that it really *will* pull out American combat brigades at a rate of one or two a month, no matter what. Hillary talks the same game while criticizing Obama for being insufficiently believable about his haste to withdraw.

The Democrats' dash leftward is all the more distressing given that success is now achievable, if far from inevitable, in Iraq:

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By John Fleming

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Al-Qaeda could be chased from the Sunni heartland by the United States with the support of ordinary Arabs; the security situation could stabilize enough for the steadily growing Iraqi security forces to shoulder the bulk of the burden; and Iraq's nascent democracy could hold together, giving the country a tolerable political system. But this will require more sacrifice from our armed forces, and more patience from the public. Five years later, not only is Saddam not coming back, but it's possible to envision Iraq on a path that accords with the interests of its citizens—and, most important, of American security.

POLITICS

A Mighty Leap

Sam Patch was an early-American daredevil who drew huge crowds to watch him jump into river gorges at waterfalls. Barack Obama is attempting the highest leap of his career in his efforts to explain his former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright.

Wright, who recently stepped down from his pulpit at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, has been a central figure in Obama's life for two decades. Wright converted him, married him, and baptized his children; one of Wright's sermons supplied the title of Obama's second book, *The Audacity of Hope*. But other Wright sermons, which have been circling the rim of the media, have now gone mainstream.

Wright has exhorted his congregation to say, not "God bless America," but "God damn America." He has called the USA the "US of KKK A." After 9/11, he said our chickens had come home to roost—those being the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and our policies toward Palestinians and South Africa. For good measure, he said that Bill Clinton had done to black people what he did to Monica Lewinsky.

These spoiled-chicken McNuggets are the products of black liberation theology, which goes beyond the American black church's traditional identification of its travails with the sufferings of Israel in the Old Testament. Wright's models—Dwight Hopkins of the University of Chicago Divinity School and James Cone of New York's Union Theological Seminary—preach that Jesus was a black man, and that God's love will lead to black power and what Cone calls "destruction of the white enemy." Black liberation theology, à la Wright, is rather like Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam, minus the science-fiction paraphernalia of Dr. Yacub and spaceships.

At first Obama responded to the controversy lamely. He compared Wright to a gabby old uncle, with whom one does not always agree; he claimed he had not been at Trinity when Wright preached some particular sermon—or some other one, or some other one beyond that.

Something more was needed, so he rolled out a major speech in Philadelphia. He praised the ideals of the American founding, and America's efforts to fulfill them. He called Wright's ugly remarks "a profoundly distorted view of this country—a view that sees white racism as endemic, and that elevates what is wrong with America above all that is right with America." He also said that Wright had done good things for his church, his community, and himself, and that he would not abandon him.

The solution to Wright's angry errors—and to the resentments of struggling white people, angered by affirmative action—was, as always with Obama, himself and his campaign of hope and change. With this twist: In Philadelphia, hope and change became the vessel of liberal policies. What ails us will be mended by "better health care, and better schools, and better jobs"; by rejecting a "corporate culture" based on "short-term greed" and a Washington "dominated by lobbyists and special interests"; and by ending a war that "never should've been waged." Early on Obama said that he himself would transcend America's partisan divide; now he says that he himself, and liberal politics, will transcend our racial divide.

Did he make the jump? Sam Patch leapt over the High Falls of the Genesee River in Rochester, N.Y., twice. The first time he lived; the second time he drowned.

POLITICS II

Fall of the Graceless

None of former New York governor Eliot Spitzer's colleagues mourned his passing; their dislike helped grease his fall. One reason Bill Clinton toughed out the Lewinsky crisis was that he went into it with 60 percent approval ratings and cordial relations with congressional Democrats. Spitzer's approval ratings, after little more than a year in office, were in the 30s, and Democratic legislators in Albany hated him scarcely less than Republicans did. Spitzer was a driven, deeply insecure man who tried to master the world with bullying, bluster, and moral posturing—qualities that served him well enough as state attorney general, but not at all when it came to dealing with coequal branches of government.

Spitzer was led to his doom by a common male fantasy: that there is such a thing as a high-class prostitute. What Spitzer got instead was a 22-year-old coming off a series of lousy boyfriends and a nonexistent musical career. However far she fell short of his fantasy, she does indeed represent the high end of an industry that traffics in runaways, incest victims, and wretched indentured servants transported from chaotic parts of the world. The calls for the legalization of "sex work" that issued, predictably, from liberals and libertarians ignored the grim realities of this "business."

There was something, however, awful—both fearsome and inspiring awe—in the completeness and speed with which Spitzer's privacy, along with that of his family and his hooker, was annihilated. One moment the world knew nothing. The next it was downloading songs, pictures, and bits of taped dialogue. The 90th Psalm tells us that "our secret sins" are set before God. It does not say that they are, or should be, set before a search engine. The marriage of filthy behavior and total exposure is one of the less happy features of the postmodern era.

Spitzer's political career is over, and good riddance (his bad manners were allied to the most threadbare liberalism). If he wants redemption, he should study John Profumo, the English politician who was caught in a sex scandal in 1963 and spent the rest of his life in humble charitable work. By such means Spitzer could make recompense for the damage he has inflicted on his family, his prostitutes, and himself.

ESSAY

A Trip Down South

In which our heroes visit Antarctica

WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY JR.

BARRY GOLDWATER traveled everywhere, and one time we found ourselves together in a remote place. I was less surprised to see the 1964 Republican candidate for president in Christchurch, New Zealand, eight years after his presidential campaign, than he was to see me. Barry Goldwater was a hardy naturalist, son of the sun of Arizona deserts, and a man of exploration and science. No tool of the trade, in his fields of interest, was unfamiliar to him, and none failed to attract his attention. The airplane was in his blood, and the radio, and instruments of magnification and miniaturization. He was perpetually curious about oddities of nature and geography, and he always had at hand the most alluring paraphernalia, cameras especially. Although I had flown in his airplane with him, pirouetting about the Grand Canyon, he teased me now, bound for the Antarctic, that my interest in natural wonders was synthetic—that I was drawn to other adornments of life. When, many years later, I performed a harpsichord concerto in Phoenix, a reporter accosted him, asking how, in the senator's judgment, Mr. Buckley had acquitted himself. Goldwater replied, "Wonderfully. Absolutely first rate." He paused. "Of course, this is the first time I ever went to a concert."

This essay is adapted from *Flying High: Remembering Barry Goldwater*, forthcoming from Perseus Publishing.

Neither of us had known the other was on the roster of this trip. There were a dozen of us altogether, the latest crew of a regular pilgrimage brought together by the secretary of the Navy every other year to publicize the American enterprise in the Antarctic. Our country's role began as a celebration of the International Geophysical Year in 1957, a common undertaking of a dozen nations, featuring the United States and the Soviet Union. The principals had made an enduring commitment to maintain two stations in the Antarctic: one of them housing at least twelve American scientists and a single Soviet scientist, the second housing at least twelve Soviets and a single American. The alien scientist had a symbolic role, a reminder that the geophysical expeditions were nonpartisan. And, we all assumed, the extranational scientist also served a peekaboo purpose, to assure that neither monolith was turning its Antarctic igloo into a laboratory for the development of ice-age warfare.

Goldwater, child of the Grand Canyon, was always impressed by sheer magnitude, and the dimensions we would be visiting were very grand indeed. Antarctica is larger than the United States and Mexico combined. Its coastline is 11,000 miles long. During the winter, the ice doubles the size of the continent. The ice at the South Pole is about two miles thick. If it were all to melt, the water level of the world would rise by 200 feet, which means that the first 14 stories of the Empire State Building would be under water. The ice in Antarctica is a deposit of 70 percent of the earth's supply of fresh water.

Goldwater pulled out, from a deep pocket of the heavy GI trousers we had all been issued, a sheet of figures. Ocean water absorbs 90 percent of the sun's heat. Snow and ice reflect 85 percent. Secretary of the Navy John Chafee, our host, had supplied Goldwater with a few graphic words. "This tells you," Goldwater held the paper up to the light, "that Antarctica is the principal generator of the energy that governs the metabolism of the earth. Its effect on weather currents and temperature is critical. Its potential uses, if we"—he pointed his finger at his throat—"us and our Russian pals out there—if we come to know how to domesticate Antarctica, that would be, Chafee's memo said, something very like the develop-

ROMAN GENN

ment of a key"—he simulated a key in hand, turning his wrist—"a key to the universe. Satisfied, Buckley?"

I admitted my derelict ignorance of these universes.

"Okay, just take it from me. There is everything there, potentially: the control of the weather; the answer to the fresh-water problem. A vat of energy greater than the known supply of the world's oil. If I had been elected president, you'd have seen it all come to life." Goldwater pursed his lips into that muted, mischievous smile, as he had so many times done over a lifetime in politics. He had the ability to attract a kind of devotional concern, the very same that had animated a majority of the delegates at the 1964 convention in San Francisco, who had made him their presidential candidate.

We had ahead of us a hideous eight-hour plane ride, lying on our backs, maneuvering for comfort by twisting ourselves about with our legs splayed out. It was a naval transport, a C–130 "Herc" turboprop. Secretary Chafee was humiliated at having to use it, but no jet plane could be trusted to land at our destination. Although it was summertime in Antarctica, the runway was unreliably icy. The airplane would deposit us at the thousand-man U.S. naval base at McMurdo, from which we would set out the next day for the 800-mile journey in a small plane with ski-like landing gear. On consecutive days we would undertake our formal visits to the tiny scientific quarries. In 1957, Moscow had coveted the post at the actual South Pole, and so had we. We won the coin toss; the Soviet Union got the magnetic South Pole, seven hundred miles distant. In these little outposts the two teams of scientists labored with their instruments, periodically receiving supplies by airplane. In the winter months the airplanes can't land but have to drop their supplies. Neither site receives a human visitor in those months.

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At McMurdo I suggested to Goldwater that we team up with his son Barry Jr., member of Congress, and my brother Jim, United States senator, who were also members of the delegation. I suggested a drink at the McMurdo Station BOQ, but Goldwater communicated the grave news that he was on the wagon for a month. We attempted festiveness nonetheless, and chatted with brother Jim and son Barry, and with our host, Secretary Chafee, about the exciting time ahead.

Two days later, at noontime, I was sitting in the crowded Soviet igloo at the magnetic South Pole. At my side were Barry Jr. and one Vostov, a talkative Russian scientist who knew no English. From time to time he would reach out over the crowded floor-level dining canvas we ate from, seeking help from an interpreter. Every five minutes he would pass great trays of caviar and tumblers of vodka, the sounds of amity welling from our cramped bodies as we ate and drank and ignored the Cold War. I acknowledged and returned a Russian toast to peace and prosperity, and then broke to respond to Barry Jr.'s sharp elbow thrust—"*My dad wants to see you*," he whispered to me, pointing to the igloo's entrance. Senator Goldwater, peering in from the dark cold, motioned me to follow him. I worked my way up and out, and followed him into the adjoining igloo. We ducked in quickly, dodging the outside temperature of 56 degrees below zero.

"Thought you might like to talk to your wife," he grinned, disguising the pride he felt at having maneuvered the Soviet radio to contrive a quick conversation with his own wife in sunny Phoenix. I was speechless as he handed me the receiver. In a few moments I heard the telephone ringing. After an interval, my wife's voice.

"It's me, darling," I said rapturously.

There was a pause. "Do you realize what time it is? It's three o'clock in the morning!"

"I'm calling from the South Pole!"

"Oh. Well, hello."

That was all the air time we had. I turned to see, standing by, my Russian buddy Vostov. He somehow communicated that he had a special gift for me. At lunch he had pleaded with me to give him U.S. bills of whatever denomination. I fished out and gave him everything I had, which amounted to $15. His elation was all-consuming.

Now, outside the radio room, he was bent on reciprocity. He thrust a ten-pound cardboard packet into my arms. "It's for you!"

The interpreter explained, "Vostov says this is a block of ice he pulled up this morning. It was formed 25,000 years ago and has been frozen ever since."

I carried the block on my lap on the 90-minute flight back from the Russian outpost. Reaching McMurdo, I got from the naval sickbay twelve urine-specimen bottles, and poured into them the melted remains of my precious ice, most of which had drizzled away in transit. When I reached home with my bottle collection, I made up labels recounting the contents' history, and sent each of my South Pole companions a souvenir bottle, properly labeled. Ten years later, when I was visiting Goldwater at his house, he dug up the keepsake and showed it to me. About half of the 25,000-year-old water had evaporated.

Returning to Christchurch, Goldwater was bound for home, I for Hawaii, as had been scheduled before the South Pole came into sight. There I would join up with fellow journalists who had been selected to accompany President Richard Nixon on his celebrated opening to China. It was rather a sad parting, back at Christchurch. Barry and I swore we would never, ever travel again to Antarctica, except in company with each other. **NR**

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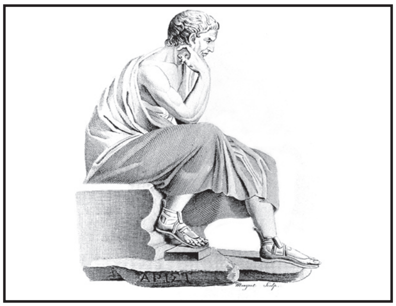

Aristotle

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■ 2008

Unknown Quantity

Are the Democrats gambling on a mystery man?

YUVAL LEVIN

In the past two weeks, Barack Obama has not looked like his familiar self on the campaign trail. The grand, inspirational calls to hope before large crowds have grown less frequent, and a new kind of Obama performance has debuted: the defensive, stammering press conference in which the candidate dodges a few hard questions and rushes off.

Two names from Obama's past have been chiefly responsible for this changed tone and feel: Tony Rezko and Jeremiah Wright. Rezko, the indicted Chicago businessman and longtime Obama fundraiser, highlights Obama's rather murky political beginnings. Any politician who rises as quickly as Obama did on the South Side of Chicago is bound to have made some questionable friends along the way, and the Rezko affair has certainly started some people in the press and the political world wondering what else might lurk undiscovered in the senator's past.

Meanwhile Wright, the pastor of Obama's Chicago church, highlights the continuing mystery of Obama's basic ideology. Is he the cool and level-headed post-political politician who addresses every difficult issue by first expounding on how everyone, on all sides, has a point? Or is he a radical liberal who nods from the pews as his pastor leads the congregation in a chorus of "God damn America," insists that the September 11 attacks were "chickens . . . coming home to roost," and dubs the country "The US of KKK A"? Obama's past fidelity to Wright has been unequivocal. The senator and his wife—who were married by Wright and had their children baptized by him—gave Wright's church more than $20,000 in donations in 2006 alone. And as Obama made clear in his speech on the subject in Philadelphia this week, he surely had a sense of Wright's strong views.

Just what the Wright and Rezko affairs actually tell us about Obama's past and his views is hard to discern at this point. But for Democrats, the greatest worry must involve not the substance of either scandal, but the fact that Obama's links to these controversies are only now emerging in full. What further unpleasant surprises await? What if this new and less appealing Obama is the real one?

The fact is, the Democratic party may be about to hitch its wagon to a remarkably unknown star, without much sense of what troubles may lie in his past—and the party's future.

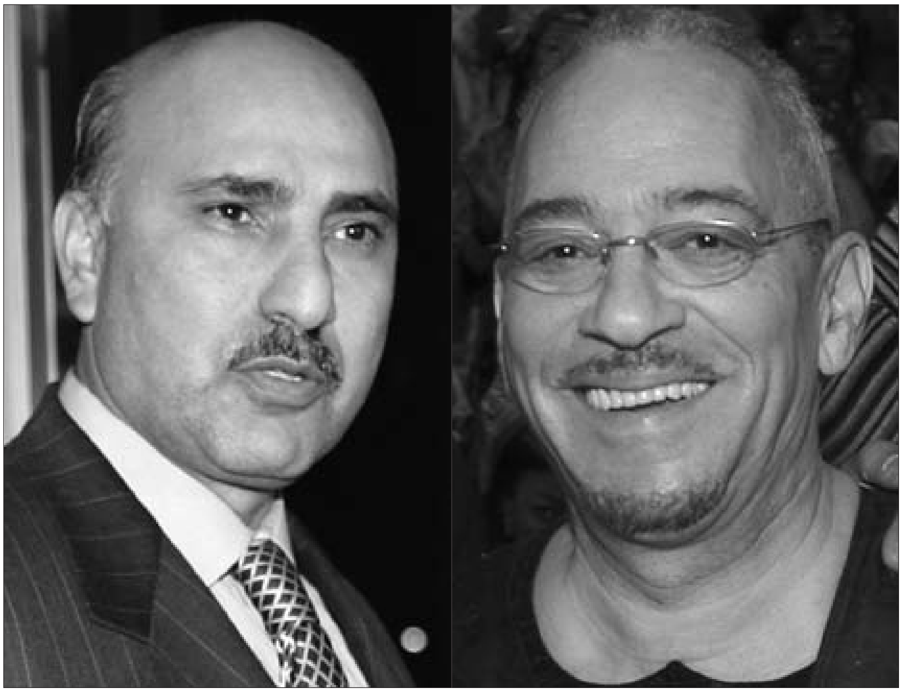
The risks of running a relative unknown can be great. In 1988, Michael Dukakis seemed to offer real promise, as far as Washington Democrats could tell. He was a successful governor with an interesting life story, intelligent and well spoken, and even possessed of ethnic and blue-collar credentials. Only too late did they learn that they had nominated a thoroughly stereotypical, dogmatic liberal, and a boring one to boot.

In 2000, George W. Bush was also not a well-known quantity, and in the week before the election, with the polls looking up, word suddenly emerged of a drunk-driving charge he had never divulged. Bush's support suffered, and the country was left with the Florida debacle in which Bush barely eked out an Electoral College win in a way that hung a question mark over the start of his presidency.

Obama actually combines these two risks of the unknown. He is, like Dukakis, a standard-issue liberal with no interesting exceptions to speak of, though the public does not yet realize it. And he has, like George W. Bush, done some things he shouldn't have (and, evidently, associated with people voters wouldn't much like), which are only slowly emerging over the course of the campaign.

But Obama might face an even greater problem. While he certainly is not well-known to voters, neither is he an unfamiliar presence in the way Bush and Dukakis were when they were nominated. Over the past year, after all, he has become something of a media superstar and built a presence in the quarters of our culture inhabited by ordinary voters, not just political junkies—that is, people who may have paid virtually no attention to the candidates until much later in previous election cycles, but who have already seen a lot of Obama this year. For these voters, learning more about Obama will not only be disconcerting, it will be disillusioning, which is far worse. Obama's trouble is not only that people know little about him, but also that much of what they know is not true.

The candidate of hope, idealism, and unity will be hurt more than most candi-



REZKO: NAM Y. HUH/AP WRIGHT: AP

Rezko and Wright: skeletons in Obama's closet

PSA COUNT UP? TOO MANY TRIPS TO THE BATHROOM?

Help lower your PSA naturally and get the rest your body needs

By Richard Huemer, M.D.

The U.S. Government has announced that they will be conducting the largest ever study on Cancer. The study will determine what are the long-term effects of Selenium and Vitamin E on the Prostate Gland and its potential for protection against Prostate Cancer.

Never was a word more feared than Cancer. Everyone is afraid of it; but, if one form of Cancer strikes at the definition of a man, it's "Prostate Cancer". It not only threatens a man's life, but his manhood. That is why this study currently under way by the Government is of such interest. WHAT IS IT THAT THE GOVERNMENT KNOWS THAT WE DON'T?

A ten-year U.S. trial that began in 1983 failed to find evidence that 200 micrograms of selenium daily could prevent skin cancer, but men taking it had 63 percent fewer cases of serious prostate problems than those who took only a placebo. "AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION COULD BE WORTH A POUND OF CURE...."

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dates would be by the "revelation" that as a Democratic senator he voted with the Democrats just about all the time. The candidate of getting beyond divisive issues will be damaged by details of what he has said about abortion, for instance. The candidate of a new kind of politics could look like a hypocrite as Americans learn more about his South Side connections. The candidate of post-racial America will have to do much more than simply say he had no idea his longtime pastor was an anti-American race baiter.

The "Obama-mania" of this past fall and winter was bound to be impossible to sustain, and we have already begun to see it lose its shine. It has, of course, helped Obama get within arm's reach of the Democratic nomination, and it will likely get him across the finish line. But in the general election, as the real Obama—for good and bad—comes to be better known, the heights he reached these last few months may well prove very costly. Obama will have a lot going for him, to be sure, and this remains a good year for the Democrats. But to the extent that both he and John McCain will introduce themselves to voters anew this summer and fall, Obama has much more to lose than McCain, and much less to gain.

In fact, McCain is in some respects in the opposite position. He will be hurt by some of what voters will learn about him; he will seem surprisingly old to people who haven't seen him much, for instance, and word of his temper will certainly get out. But what voters don't know about him is, on the whole, better for him than what they do know. Everyone has a sense that McCain comported himself with dignity as a prisoner of war, but the full extent and details of his story will deeply impress the American public. Everyone knows that he comes from a military family and believes in service, but when voters learn that he has two sons in harm's way in the military, they will think even better of him.

Obama's reintroduction will be much more difficult and risky. And for Democrats, the unknowns in that process must be the most frightening prospect. What further surprises lurk in Obama's little-known personal history? The last few weeks have made that question suddenly crucial. **NR**

■ **2008 II**

Oh No You Can't

Amateur propagandists in the YouTube age

ROB LONG

It's difficult to remember, I know, but not too long ago, before computers and word-processing software, hopeful screenwriters had to type their scripts on a typewriter. It was a frustrating pain in the neck, frankly, because the professional format of a screenplay is a complicated mess involving lots of tabs and dialogue margins, eccentric capitalization rules, right-side justification for scene transitions, that sort of thing.

On the other hand, it kept the riff-raff out. The physical tortures of typing the script format were a formidable barrier to entry. You had to really love your script idea to put up with it.

Today, anyone with a script idea and a few dollars can buy a copy of Final Draft and type merrily away, confident that margins, character names, scene transitions, all of it will be instantly—effortlessly—put into place. Anyone with a few dollars more, for that matter, can buy a digital movie camera and elementary editing software like iMovie or Final Cut, and make his own finished movie. If it's short enough, and stupid enough, and on YouTube, it will find an audience. YouTube videos are the sub-prime mortgages of the entertainment business—made possible only because of rapid advances in technology and communication, they're everywhere, and cheap, and they seem harmless. Everybody's doing it.

Just ask Barack Obama. For the past few months, he's been the toast of web video. Talented amateurs—the "Obama Girl," for instance—have been putting up fun, goofy mash notes on YouTube and other places, reinforcing the image of Barack Obama as the cool, progressive grassroots choice. Most of these are sloppy but effective—highly personal declarations of devotion to a presidential candidate—but what's most arresting about these amateur offerings is how emotional and needy the filmmakers seem. The Barack Experience is a little like the Beatles on Ed Sullivan: What you remember aren't the songs, but the tears and the screaming.

It's usually the other way around. It's usually the candidate with the greasy, hysterical smile; it's usually the candidate who seems grasping and desperate and hungry. When Hillary Clinton works the rope line—but let's not single her out; the same could be said of pretty much any recent presidential hopeful—she's got that pleading, maniacal, vote-begging look in her eye that we instantly recognize as the sign of someone who really, really, *really* needs to win this one.

And yet Barack Obama glides through these videos—and the campaign in general—in composed, unruffled sleekness. He's what pop psychologists call "emotionally unavailable." He's too cool for school, which is why he inspires such nutty, over-the-top fanaticism. The YouTube amateurs, and the voters who stream them, react to this the way twelve-year-old girls react to the remote boy who ignores them: They go nuts; they spin fantasies; they doodle hearts on their binders; they make home movies.

Homemade web videos are the fan clubs of the digital generation, and it's amazing to reflect on just how simple it is these days—a few clicks of the mouse, a broadband connection—to make and broadcast a fairly polished video product. Not too long ago, being a charter member of the Senator John F. Kennedy for President Fan Club entailed a lot of door-knocking and envelope-licking and phone-banking. But, of course, it didn't make you a star. And that's the odd aspect to the Barack Obama web-video devotionals: In each of them, the candidate isn't the star. The filmmaker is.

"Yes We Can," a web video currently popping up all over the place, is part music video, part celebrity endorsement. The leader of the Black Eyed Peas (you've heard them, right? *Right?!*), a guy who goes by the URL-sounding name of will.i.am, sets one of Obama's stemwinders to music, and the result is a great-looking Gap ad of a campaign video—handheld, black-and-white (of course; this is serious business, you know?), lots of solemn famous faces peering out at you, a guy with a guitar, that sort of thing.

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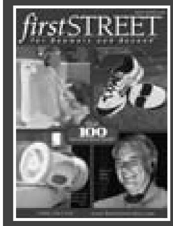

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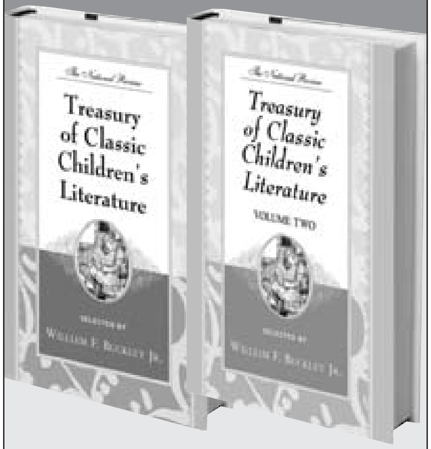
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graphic profile of the typical NATIONAL REVIEW reader, and there's about a .003 percent chance you're going to recognize anybody on this video, except maybe Scarlett Johansson and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, so you're just going to have to trust me when I tell you that these are famous people, all of them, and they want you to vote for Obama.

Which is something you'll have to keep reminding yourself, because Obama himself makes a pretty truncated appearance on this video. "Show the product" is one of the first tenets of advertising, but in the recent "Yes We Can" video, the product never gets the screen to himself. The most he usually gets is one-half of the space, in a split-screen, flanked by famous people looking serious and committed, furrowing their brows to the beat of the catchy "Yes We Can" tune playing underneath.

Toward the end of the video, the image of Obama disappears completely. It's just his voice on the track, but the whole screen is devoted instead to more brow-furrowing, more solemnity, more famous faces. "Yes, yes," you can hear them saying, "he's inspiring, he's wonderful. But enough about him. Isn't it cool how into him *I* am?" Me. That's, ultimately, the creepy thing about all of the Obama videos floating around the net. The chilly, smooth, monochrome candidate is in the background. And that's a big change from the sweaty attention-hogging candidates—and presidents—we've become used to.

I have an actor friend who, early in his career, attended a very popular, respected acting class. On the first day, the teacher arrived in a tight black leotard and a million scarves and he (yes; *he*) told the class to stand up. "Now, each of you," he trilled, "wrap your arms around yourself and give yourself a big, hurting hug. And repeat: *wonderful, wonderful me!*"

Because, you know, that's a problem we have out here in Hollywood: We just don't love ourselves enough.

Malignant narcissism isn't confined to the borders of Los Angeles County. It's a nationwide epidemic—on reality shows, talk shows, blogs, podcasts, the message is always the same: Pay attention to me, to wonderful, wonderful me. That's a big part of Obama's appeal. He lets it be about us. And if there's only one thing an Obama fan loves more than Obama, it's his wonderful, wonderful self. **NR**

■ **CONGRESS**

The Power Of 41

Senator McConnell fights for the filibuster

RAMESH PONNURU

MITCH MCCONNELL, the Kentucky Republican who leads his party in the Senate, has a number on his mind. It's not 51, the number of Republican senators he would need to become the Senate majority leader. It's 41. If he can count on 41 senators to vote with him on filibusters, he has a say in the country's government. If he doesn't, Senate Republicans are largely irrelevant.

"The power of 41," he says, "is the power to shape or to block." He's right. The Democrats do not have much to show for having taken control of Congress in 2006—and the main reason is that McConnell has had the votes he needs.

When they took power, the Democrats wanted to let unions organize companies without winning secret-ballot elections. The party got its way in the House, where the majority party usually wins. In the Senate, though, the minority party can filibuster. Republicans did so, and the bill died.

Senate Republicans have reshaped bills more often than they have killed them. Congress wanted to pass a one-year "patch" to keep the Alternative Minimum Tax from hitting more families. Democrats, especially in the House, wanted to raise other taxes to offset the patch, having run on pledges of fiscal responsibility. Senate Republicans held firm, and the Democrats ended up passing a patch with no tax increase—infuriating Rahm Emanuel, who had guided the House Democrats to victory in 2006.

A Republican filibuster in the Senate, or the threat of one, has forced the Democrats to back down on issue after issue. They had to drop a tax increase from their energy bill. They had to adopt President Bush's position on the minimum wage, pairing an increase with

Internists Endorse Legal Access to Medical Marijuana

The American College of Physicians, the nation's largest organization of Internists, is calling for protection of both doctors and patients from criminal and civil penalties in states that have adopted medical-marijuana laws.

A position paper just released by their board of regents lists half a dozen diseases for which marijuana has already proven effective and they say the federal government must stop blocking promising research into this beneficial drug.*

"Evidence not only supports the use of medical marijuana in certain conditions but also suggests numerous indications for cannabinoids... The science on medical marijuana should not be obscured or hindered by the debate surrounding the legalization of marijuana for general use."

The College of Physicians now joins the ground swell of medical groups that fully or partially support research and access.

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small-business tax cuts. They had to accept Bush's demand on the level of discretionary domestic spending. Harry Reid wanted a stimulus bill with more spending, but McConnell said no and got enough Republicans to vote with him to make it stick. The stimulus is almost entirely made up of tax cuts.

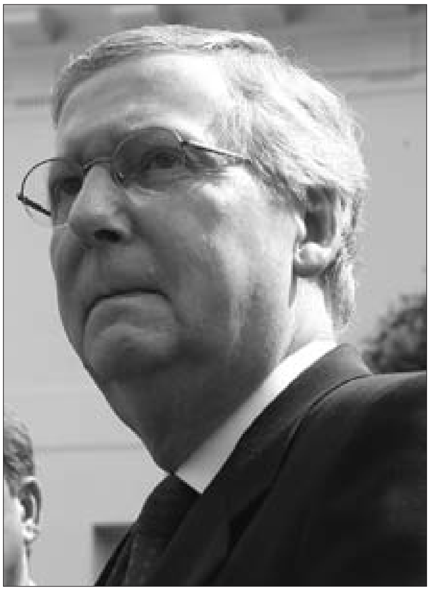
Senate Democrats held 34 votes on the Iraq War in 2007. At the start of the year, the conventional wisdom was that Republicans were going to start abandoning the president on the issue. But almost every time, Republicans stopped the Democrats by keeping them from getting a 60-vote supermajority. (The one exception was a war-funding bill, which Republicans did not want to filibuster. They let Bush veto it instead.) By the end of the year, 22 Democrats were joining with McConnell on an amendment to give Bush the war funding he wanted with no strings attached. The success of the surge has helped to make the politics of the war more favorable for Republicans, but the power of 41 kept political support for the war from collapsing when the public was most against it.

On one big issue, Senate Republicans were not able to hold their 41 votes: legislation to expand the children's health-insurance program, which passed both the House and the Senate before President Bush vetoed it. But without McConnell and the Senate Republicans, Bush would have had to cast many more vetoes. Democrats would have liked to fight an unpopular president over vetoes of poll-tested legislation, instead of explaining that, thanks to McConnell, they couldn't get their bills through Congress.

The ability of a minority of the Senate to filibuster legislation has, in short, made the last two years of the Bush presidency much more successful for Bush and his party than they would otherwise have been. And the filibuster could become even more important if Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton wins in November. At that point, Republicans will no longer have vetoes and veto threats as a backstop against liberal legislation.

"If Obama has a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate, he will take this country farther left than it has gone since the Great Society," warns McConnell. If Democrats control the White House and the Congress, only a Republican filibuster will stop a great leap forward in government control of health care.

Republicans can lose eight seats and still have 41 members, but the closer they get to that number, the more they need to stick together. Right now, McConnell can sustain a filibuster if a few Republicans side with the Democrats, and can even tell a Republican in a tight spot that he doesn't need his vote. McConnell isn't sure this will be the case after the November elections. Some of the filibuster votes have been close enough to give him ample reason to worry.


ALEX WONG/GETTY

Sen. Mitch McConnell

On a bill to extend congressional voting rights to the District of Columbia, McConnell lost seven Republicans, and only one Democrat sided with him, leaving him a margin of two votes to sustain a filibuster. He also had only a two-vote margin to defeat a bill to impose price controls (in all but name) on drug companies that participate in Medicare. The Democrats had 59 votes, one short of what they needed, on their big-spending stimulus bill and their tax-increasing energy bill.

If the number of Republican senators drops by four or five this fall, McConnell will lose such votes. He would have to hold almost all of the remaining Republicans to prevail, and that wouldn't happen very often: All it would take to lose would be for a few Republicans to agree with the Democrats, or to decide that getting along with the majority party is in their political interest. Democrats might be able to pick off an additional Republican or two by making side deals.

Republicans are at risk of losing enough seats to bring about McConnell's nightmare. Sen. John Ensign of Nevada, who runs the Republicans' Senate campaign committee, believes that his party could regain control of the chamber if the election goes well. But he also highlights the importance of the filibuster, and the need for a margin of error. "You need to have 47 or 48 [Republicans] to get 41," he says.

Republicans are almost certain to lose a seat in Virginia, where Republican John Warner is retiring and popular Democrat Mark Warner, a former governor, is running. Republican senators are retiring in Colorado and New Mexico, creating opportunities for Democratic pickups. Four blue-state Republican incumbents look vulnerable: Susan Collins in Maine, Norm Coleman in Minnesota, John Sununu in New Hampshire, and Gordon Smith in Oregon.

The news gets worse. Sen. Ted Stevens, a Republican from Alaska, is running for reelection even though he is a) 84 years old and b) under investigation for corruption.

Democrats have an outside shot at picking up yet one more Republican seat: that of Mitch McConnell. It is rare for a party leader to lose his seat, but Republicans defeated Tom Daschle in 2004, when he was the top Senate Democrat. The Left wants to return the favor by unseating McConnell. Daschle was undone because his leadership role in the national Democratic party pulled him too far to the left for conservative South Dakota. McConnell is from a red state and thus should be in a stronger position. But his challenger will benefit from a lot of out-of-state money and friendly local media. The left-wing activist group MoveOn.org opened a Kentucky office last summer.

Why is the picture so bleak? In part because of the political calendar. Of the 35 Senate seats up for election this year, Republicans hold 23 and Democrats only 12. (That's the price Republicans pay for picking up seats in 1996 and 2002.) More Republicans than Democrats are retiring. The national mood is running against Republican incumbents.

Also, Republicans have not found strong candidates to run against red-state Democrats such as Arkansas senator Mark Pryor. There is only one Demo-

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cratic senator that Republicans are at all hopeful of beating: Mary Landrieu of Louisiana.

Hurricane Katrina may have discredited the Bush administration nationally, but in Louisiana it discredited Democrats, who ran the state and New Orleans governments. It also drove many Democratic voters out of the state. Landrieu is a weak candidate to start with: She barely won election in the first place in 1996, and allegations of voter fraud tainted her victory. She had to go through a runoff election to keep her seat in 2002. She may not be able to survive the state's recent political changes.

For the last few months, conservatives have been paying attention to the presidential race to the exclusion of everything else. They ought to start noticing the Senate races. Sununu and McConnell, in particular, are strong conservatives who could use some help. Former congressman Bob Schaffer, who is running for a Senate seat in Colorado, falls into the same category. Even though this is supposed to be a bad year for Republicans and Colorado has been trending blue, he is holding his own in the polls against Democratic congressman Mark Udall. Look for Schaffer to campaign against Udall as a "Boulder liberal."

Conservatives are less enthusiastic about Norm Coleman, who has broken with them on some issues. But he is a few points down against liberal comedian Al Franken, and conservatives may find that the prospect of "Senator Franken" is all the motive they need to get involved in the Minnesota race.

Republicans are highly likely to remain in the minority in Congress next year. If McCain gets elected president, he may need Senate Republican filibusters the same way Bush has needed them. He will also need conservative votes to get judicial nominees confirmed. If Obama or Clinton is elected, on the other hand, the number of Republican senators may determine how far left the new president goes.

McConnell notes the difference between Bill Clinton's liberalism during his first two years in office, when Democrats ran Capitol Hill, and his moderation after Republicans took control. "He moderated when he had to," McConnell says. He hopes Obama would have to moderate, too. **NR**

■ THE MIDEAST

Dead End

The heartbreaking realities of today's Israel

DAVID PRYCE-JONES

Jerusalem

Israel's enemies have always wished to destroy it, of course, but what's new this time is that they are avoiding the set-piece battles that lost them all previous wars, and are instead elaborating the tactics of terror. Islamist Iran has made itself the driving force. The terrorist movements Hezbollah and Hamas are both Iranian satellites, and their presence on Israel's borders ensures that Iran can already engage in terrorism on its own terms and at times of its own choosing. There's a civilizational dimension to it as well: Science and technology have hitherto given Western states their supremacy over the Muslim world. As Iran moves toward possession of the nuclear weapon, this historic advantage is neutralized. A nuclear-armed Iran will be able to promote terror at state level, changing the balance of forces as never before against the West in general and Israel in particular.

You don't have to be in Israel very long, or hold many conversations, to realize how the threat from Iran induces denial in some and fear in others. The well-known historian Benny Morris set an example in an essay last year with the haunting title "The Second Holocaust Is Looming." One bright morning not too long from now, he prophesied, the mullahs in Qom will meet in secret session under a portrait of the Ayatollah Khomeini and solemnly give the go-ahead to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has sworn to "wipe Israel off the map" and has been avidly pursuing the nuclear means of doing so. "With a country the size and shape of Israel probably four or five hits will suffice: no more Israel," Morris concluded. Never mind that thousands, perhaps millions, of Muslims would also die, because in the Islamist mindset, Allah would know his own. Never mind Israeli reprisal either: Iran would have turned itself into a suicide bomber.

Deterrence is difficult and dangerous. Last September, there was an Israeli strike against an installation deep in Syria. Secrets are not usually kept in Israel, but nobody has yet revealed what this operation was about, and Arab and Iranian sources are as mysteriously silent. The target had to be important enough to justify the risk, leading many to conclude that it had to do with weapons of mass destruction, implicating Iran. According to unconfirmed reports, Hercules aircraft also landed ground forces for the purpose of removing whatever was contained in that installation.

Further rumor among journalists has it that Ehud Barak, the minister of defense, has cleared his diary of engagements in order to chair a committee devoted to the question of Iran. As a military strategist with an intelligence background put it to me, "Israel isn't in the same league as Iran and can't deal with it." President Bush in the past has suggested he might take action to prevent Iran from going nuclear, but what with polls and the NIE report that whitewashed Iran, he seems instead to be consigning this issue to his successor.

According to the same strategist, containment through sanctions and diplomacy is therefore the last resort, but virtually hopeless.

In the new Cold War shaping up between Islamism and the democratic West, Israel holds the front line. Once again, the values of the opposing sides are irreconcilable. Israel, and behind it the United States, treats even the most intractable issues as open to negotiation and compromise. In the Arab and Muslim order, power is absolute and has to be victorious, so "negotiation" and "compromise" are euphemisms for shame and surrender.

The present plight of the Palestinians perfectly illustrates how the logic of absolute power dictates extreme behavior. For the past 50 or so years, Arab nationalism had been the dominant ideology in the Middle East. Fatah under Yasser Arafat, a typically absolute leader, was the Palestinian branch of Arab nationalism, but its failure to provide a decent life for the masses was total. Islamism appeared a viable alternative. The founding of Hamas in 1987 as an Islamist movement was thus a challenge to Fatah. Slowly but steadily, the conflict between Hamas and Fatah grew, and came to an inevitable head in the civil war in Gaza in 2005. This was small-scale, but still brutal enough to frighten the population into submission.

Civil war has divided the Palestinians ideologically and even geographically, with Hamas in Gaza and Fatah on the rump of the West Bank. The loser, Mahmoud Abbas, heir of Arafat as leader of Fatah, is a broken man. Nominally he governs from his office in Ramallah, but actually he is hardly more than a figurehead. Maj. Gen. Gadi Shamni, the general officer commanding the Israeli army's central command, makes the stark point that, without the Israeli presence on the West Bank, Hamas would take over within two days. Yet out of the blue, President Bush said that he expects the Palestinians to have a state of their own by the end of the year, and to guarantee Israeli security on top of it. A so-called peace process regularly brings together Abbas and Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert, as well as other ministers and officials at lower levels; terrorist outrages regularly oblige them to break off meetings. Now and again Condoleezza Rice checks in to Tel Aviv and Ramallah to admonish the parties for backsliding. The Western powers have pledged $7.7 billion to Abbas, though how much of this will ever find its way to the people on the street is a very open question.

Whatever could have prompted them all to take so rash and unrealistic a position? It is hallucinating. Fatah, Hamas, and Israel are engaged in a three-cornered contest for power, and it is crassly Eurocentric to think that this can be negotiated to any conclusion.

Iran evidently has the opposite, Islamocentric belief that power is indeed absolute, and that the conquest of Israel is not only desirable but achievable.

As the ayatollahs see it, the fighting launched by Hezbollah in 2005 led to a temporary stalemate, and with a lot more arms and money they will do better next time. Hamas operates identically. The borders of the Gaza Strip with Israel and with Egypt are fortified and closed. Hamas activists have been smuggling arms through tunnels dug under the border with Egypt.

Over the last 18 months, Hamas and affiliated Islamist groups have fired some 8,000 rockets and other missiles to a depth of about twelve miles into the Israeli territory adjoining the Gaza Strip, and especially the small town of Sderot, with a population of 20,000, many of them immigrants. Known as Qassams, these rockets are erratic, and have killed only about a dozen people, though maiming many more, and driving out of their homes hundreds of others. The rockets are fired from behind a screen of civilians so that Israeli countermeasures are liable to kill innocent women and children, prompting an international outcry that the response is "disproportionate" and thus handing Hamas a propaganda victory. As a constant needling challenge to Israeli sovereignty, yet not one so damaging as to merit serious reprisal, the Hamas tactic displays undoubted imagination and innovation, however callous. The shaping of the conflict remains with them.

كل هذا الصمت
وأطفال غزة
يصرخون..
لتوقفوا الحرب الظالمة
عن أبناء شعبي
وطننا واحد
ودمنا
واحد
وهدفنا واحد
سنقاوم الاحتلال
نقطع القيد عن أبناء شعبنا
نحرر الوطن .. ونصنع الدولة

Palestinians rally in the West Bank.

SAIF DAHLAH/AFP/GETTY MARCH 3, 2008

Lately Hamas organized a mass breakout through the fortified barrier with Egypt, and used this occasion to bring into Gaza Iranian-made Grad missiles with a heavier payload and a longer range than the Qassams. (They also brought in a number of men, possibly from al-Qaeda, trained in Iran.) At the beginning of March, several of these Grads hit the city of Ashkelon, which has a population of 120,000 and much industrial capacity. At the same moment, a barrage of some 50 Qassams was fired daily. Here was an escalation of the ongoing test of strength. An Israeli armored column then entered Gaza and killed about 120 Palestinians, most of them from Hamas, only to have to withdraw to the usual worldwide clamor about "disproportion." Olmert made it plain that if Hamas desisted from violence he would accept a truce. "We don't have a policy of operations, but rather one of systematic fighting, over time, every place there is terror," he said, or, in plain language: He has no idea what to do. As if to prove Olmert's helplessness, a Hamas gunman shot dead eight teenage students in a religious seminary in Jerusalem.

The military strategist with whom I talked argues that there are no solutions. A truce only allows Hamas to rearm. In his view there is no alternative to a local version of the Petraeus surge, an occupation of Gaza in great force, and a clearing-out of Hamas. As the terrorists can't easily be identified and separated out from civilians, the operation would be "like punching air," both necessary and futile. Which is the problem in a nutshell.

Throughout Israel you see evidence of normality, an expanding economy with construction and cranes everywhere, art exhibitions, prizewinning films, crowded cafés. But it is abnormal for the country to be inextricably caught in the Arab and Muslim crisis of identity, to be obliged to enter into a test of strength alien to its own cultural values, and which casts the shadow of a nuclear holocaust. It's more comfortable for everyone to deny the reality of this unexpected new Cold War, and pretend to believe that democracy and absolutism can settle their differences in a peace process. **NR**

■ CULTURE WATCH

Of Governors And Call Girls

Some thoughts upon Eliot Spitzer's downfall

THEODORE DALRYMPLE

No doubt it signifies a mixture of moral frivolity and profound lack of sexual imagination, but one of the first questions that occurred to me when I read of Gov. Eliot Spitzer's involvement with a high-class (or perhaps I should say expensive) prostitution ring was: What acts does a woman perform to be worth $3,000 per hour, compared with one who charges "only" $1,000?

Of course, I have long realized that there is a hierarchy among prostitutes, as there is in all professions. My first patient with tertiary syphilis, for example, was an old prostitute, impoverished, raddled, and toothless, who still plied her trade on waste ground for the price of a cigarette. Her pimp was also her husband, and her cries of despair when he abandoned her still ring in my mind's ear. I have never encountered desolation deeper than hers.

Another of my patients was a smartly dressed black woman whom I initially took to be a business executive. She was a dominatrix. She had her own website and flew around the world flogging the prominent of many nations. She was particularly proud of her connection, if that is the word I seek, with a senior judge in one of the southern states of the U.S. She had a large house and an expensive car and was proud of her success. It was skilled work, after all, and she provided value for money, or else her clients would not have retained her services. Many of them, indeed, were in love with her. She was so amusing that I could not condemn her, even in my heart.

This reminds me that prostitutes in literature have generally been treated kindly. No literary intellectual ever won his spurs by denouncing what everyone else had already denounced with pursed lips and a tut-tut. We do not think of Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet as wicked, but rather as good-time girls with hearts of gold. Maupassant's stories favor prostitutes over their respectable, bourgeois clients. In Russian literature, fallen women serve to illustrate the possibility and power of redemption (and the generosity of authors). The demand for paid sex has generally been more severely condemned in literature than the supply.

Eliot Spitzer, alongside his wife, Silda, announces his resignation.

TIMOTHY CLARY/AFP/GETTY

One might have supposed that in a relatively liberal sexual environment such as ours, the demand for prostitution would decline, but that does not seem to have happened. This suggests that raw, biological frustration of the sex drive is not at the root of the demand. Appetites not only grow with feeding, but diversify with it. The limits or boundaries of licit and illicit change, but the demand for the illicit remains constant.

Mr. Spitzer can hardly have been driven to act as he did by the kind of sexual frustration that is said to be common in Muslim countries, where all contact with females before and outside of marriage is forbidden. He is both rich and powerful, and in our society men of that sort do not usually have much difficulty finding someone with whom to have an affair, if they feel the need. Moreover, one might have expected a man like Mr. Spitzer—who built his career on the prosecution (or was it the persecution?) of very rich men who supposedly had broken the rules without any compelling need to do so—to behave with circumspection, if not extreme caution, with regard to breaking rules, moral or legal. He who rises by moral outrage, after all, tends to fall by moral outrage.

On the other hand, the very dangerousness of what Mr. Spitzer did may have been what made it so exciting to him. For those with such a turn of mind, there are few pleasures greater than that of breaking rules and getting away with it; it heightens the esteem in which they hold their own intellects.

But there are other advantages in resorting to a prostitute. Prostitutes exact no emotional commitment; unlike in a proper affair, the balance of power remains firmly and predictably in favor of the man who hands over the cash. Not only can he suit his tastes and indulge his fantasies, but the possibilities of blackmail, emotional and financial, are much less than with an affair of the heart. Spurned lovers are notorious for seeking vengeance, but prostitutes are professionals, to whom a reputation for discretion and the hope of future business are important. They do not recriminate when their clients no longer come to see them. So there is safety as well as excitement in the transaction.

What of the supply—that is to say, of the prostitutes? Why do they become

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prostitutes? If there were no necessitous women in the world, would prostitution survive?

It would. Although middle-class sentimentalists like to think that all prostitutes are driven to the profession as snowflakes before the storm, with absolutely no choice in the matter (because no one would do voluntarily what prostitutes do), a moment's reflection shows that this cannot be so. For even if some young women are brought into Europe from Africa and Latin America and forced into sexual slavery, the fact remains that most prostitutes were not forced by circumstances but chose voluntarily to ply this particular trade. No one's circumstances are so dire that they lead to prostitution as surely as life leads to death; if desperate circumstances inexorably made prostitutes, after all, we would have more prostitutes rather than fewer.

Besides, whatever the social origins of most prostitutes, by no means do all of them come from backgrounds of deprivation. Recently in England, in the small town of Ipswich, a man was convicted of murdering five prostitutes (serial killers quite often choose prostitutes, as if to avenge some terrible sexual humiliation). Two of his victims, at least, were of middle-class origin; one had spent her childhood playing the piano and riding ponies. Interestingly, prostitution disappeared from the town in the wake of the murderer's activities, suggesting that this way of earning a living was not an unavoidable reaction to circumstances.

Quite near where I once lived, by a reservoir around which I often took walks, the body of a 16-year-old girl was found. She had run away from her middle-class home to what she thought was the glamour of the streets and of prostitution; she was bored by respectability and the prospect of a normal career. Her pimps had plied her overenthusiastically with heroin; she had died, and they dumped her body in the hope that it would not be found.

The supply side of prostitution, therefore, is not to be laid wholly at the door of desperate material circumstances. How, then, is it to be ranked with mankind's other moral weaknesses?

I have discussed this matter with quite a few prostitutes in my clinic, and even those who have not studied moral philosophy have been able to justify their ways to me, if not to God, with plausible and even sophisticated arguments. They would not have been prostitutes, they said, if there had been no demand for prostitutes; and many of their customers, perhaps even most, were drawn from the supposedly respectable portions of society. From what standpoint, then, did society look down on them?

For Mr. Spitzer, I suspect, they would have had nothing but contempt: a stern moralist who was no better than the pathetic traveling salesman who wants a bit of furtive fun, or sexual release, with a rather less expensive prostitute on his nights away from his wife.

"You men!" says Sadie Thompson at the end of Somerset Maugham's great story "Rain," about a Protestant missionary seduced by a prostitute in the South Sea. "You filthy, dirty pigs! You're all the same, all of you." The prostitutes would agree with her: For them, Mr. Spitzer would be the exact moral equivalent of the missionary Davidson, who is seduced by Sadie Thompson while he tries to convert her to virtue, and then kills himself by cutting his throat in the tide. He, like Mr. Spitzer, did not live up to his own standards because, in the jaundiced view of the profession, no man ever does.

Besides, asked the prostitutes, in what way is it worse to sell one's body than to sell one's soul? How many people have never done something they knew to be wrong, merely to continue in employment? How many women, not considered prostitutes, have let the material prospects of their suitors affect their decisions to marry them?

All this rationalization, however, founders on one simple question: Would you, I asked them, want your daughters to follow in your footsteps, even if they could earn a lot of money by doing so? Not a single one has ever replied yes to that question; all were vehemently against.

We can call prostitutes sex workers, and prostitution the sex industry, but the oldest profession is also the oldest subject of opprobrium. I shall never forget the immortally distasteful words of a 15-year-old patient of mine, who was very easy with her sexual favors, and who may very well one day have decided to do for money what for the moment she did for fun.

"My mum," she said, "calls me a slut. But I'm good at what I do." **NR**

■ PEOPLE

Let Us Now Praise No. 4

The greatness of Brett Favre

STEPHEN F. HAYES

BRETT FAVRE paused for just a moment before getting up. He was on his back looking skyward near the Minnesota Vikings' 40-yard line, with his feet on the ground in front of him and his legs bent slightly. The elbows of the white long-sleeved T-shirt he wore under his green No. 4 jersey were covered in mud from a cold rain earlier in the day. Now it was just below freezing, and Favre's short, forceful breaths were visible as he summoned up the strength to get back on his feet.

"Who hit me?" he shouted.

Moments earlier, Favre had released a quick pass to his right, half a beat before hard-hitting linebacker Napoleon Harris, coming on a blitz, shoved him with both hands. Favre had been following through on the pass, and the impact of the hit propelled him backward through the air. His butt hit the ground first, causing his head to snap back violently, smacking the not-quite-frozen tundra.

No one answered his question.

Favre jumped up and walked toward Harris. "Who hit me?"

Harris looked at Favre. "I eased up. I didn't even hit you, dog."

"That was you? That was you? I thought you hit harder than that," Favre said, laughing as he walked away while shaking his head in mock disgust.

After suffering through the Packers' Lynn Dickey, David Whitehurst, Rich Campbell, and Don Majkowski eras, I've watched virtually every single snap Brett Favre has taken as a Green Bay Packer, even in preseason games. (I missed a Monday Night Football game against Baltimore a few years back because I was

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traveling overseas with Vice President Dick Cheney, but since Air Force Two has an Internet connection I was able to follow the game play by play on ESPN's website.) But that moment is what I remember most about Brett Favre.

It came during a game in which he completed only 26 of 50 passes. He did not throw a touchdown and tossed two interceptions on consecutive offensive plays, one of them for a defensive touchdown in the third quarter that put the Vikings ahead, 7–6. But Favre rallied. He led the Packers on a drive that resulted in a 44-yard field goal with 1 minute and 34 seconds remaining. They won, 9–7. It was the 36th time he had led his team to a game-winning comeback.

It was also the last home game of the 2006 season, and many of his teammates expected him to retire. "I'm hoping that he comes back, but you never know," said wide receiver Donald Driver after the game. The Packers won the following week, too, giving them four wins in a row to end the season.

Favre did return, of course. This past year he led the Packers to a 13–3 regular-season record. Over his final 22 games, he was 18–4. When he retired on March 4, 2008, at the age of 38, Favre was playing the best football of his career.

And it was quite a career. He holds most of the individual records for quarterbacks, including: 160 wins as starter, 61,655 passing yards, 5,377 completions, 8,758 attempts, and 442 passing touchdowns—22 more than his closest competitor, Dan Marino. Favre also passed for more than 20 touchdowns in 13 of his 17 seasons. He is the NFL's only three-time MVP, a certain first-ballot Hall of Fame inductee. And he is one of the most durable professional athletes of all time. He started 253 consecutive games for the Packers—while the rival Chicago Bears started 21 different quarterbacks.

If he is not the NFL's all-time greatest quarterback, and many think he is, then he's one of only a handful who can be included in that discussion.

On ESPN, after word began to spread that Favre would be retiring, a former player from the Detroit Lions spoke of a conversation he had with his father before his team played the Packers. Play well, his dad had said, and be sure to shake Brett Favre's hand after the game. Lots of fathers must have given the same advice. Players from opposing teams often lined up after games just to be able to meet him or to renew acquaintances. On most days, Favre stayed to clasp his freakishly large hands around theirs until no one was left.

BRIAN KERSEY/UPI

His final game: January 20, 2008

Favre seemed to understand he was a legend even as he continued to play the game. And yet one of the reasons he is one of the best-loved and most-admired football players in generations is that he has always been very human. Even casual football fans know about his troubles with drinking and prescription painkillers, his wife Deanna's cancer, and the death of his father, Irv, at the age of 58. He was open with his emotions and cried during the press conference at which he announced his retirement formally. After he retired, his brother Scott suggested to a reporter that Favre might have returned for another year if only the Packers had tried even a little to persuade him. He was needy—human even as he left the game a legend.

Favre's place in football history was already assured when I traveled back to my native Wisconsin for training camp in 2002. Surprisingly, the Packers' public-relations staff hadn't questioned my request for on-field credentials despite the fact that I write for a political magazine based in Washington, D.C. I went for one reason: to see Brett Favre up close.

I stood on the sidelines with a small crowd of Packers-beat writers and tried not to seem excited when he jogged onto the field. He was wearing yellow shorts and a red jersey that signified he was not to be touched by his teammates. The other quarterbacks, veteran Doug Pederson and rookie Craig Nall, were wearing red jerseys too. None of the quarterbacks had on a helmet or pads.

The formal practice would not start for several minutes, so to pass the time Favre started a preliminary competition between his backups. Twenty yards down the field stood a large square net, perhaps 30 feet high, and draped in front of it was a solid-green tarp. The tarp had several holes about three feet in diameter. Favre had Pederson and Nall each throw a dozen balls. Nall threw harder, but Pederson was more accurate. He won by tossing two balls through the designated hole.

Favre wasn't participating, but gave Nall some grief for losing to an old guy like Pederson. Nall suggested that Favre take a shot.

Favre flung a ball aimlessly toward the tarp. It smacked off the flimsy green wall and landed with a thud on the ground. Then, after some grief from his backups, he got serious. The first ball exploded off his hand and traveled, as if attached to a rope, through the hole. He smiled at his teammates and did it again. I no longer remember how many times, exactly, Favre did this. But it was at least five in a row, the last of which he threw casually, just as he had the first. Even the grizzled old beat reporters nudged each other as it fluttered through the hole without touching the tarp. Pederson and Nall took some more practice.

Favre walked away smiling. **NR**

The Limits Of Hope

Obama is selling heaven, but his product isn't new

JONAH GOLDBERG

MY colleague Kate O'Beirne once told me the story of her brief meeting with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican. The O'Beirne family met the pontiff at his private Mass. He chatted pleasantly with her sons about soccer and whatnot, and then moved on to others in the pews.

Or at least that's what Kate has been told. She doesn't remember the conversation at all, so awed was she by the encounter. I was reminded of this sweet story when I read about Kim Mack, who was looking for a mere presidential candidate but found much more in Barack Obama. "He looked at me, and the look in his eyes was worth 1,000 words," Mack told the *Sacramento Bee.* She's now a field organizer for Obama. "Obama hugged her and whispered something in her ear," the newspaper reported, but "she was so thrilled she doesn't remember what it was."

Mack is not exceptional. Obama recruiters are encouraged to proselytize not by talking about "issues" but by testifying about how they "came to" the candidate, in much the way born-again Christians testify about how they "came to Jesus." At Obama rallies, bouts of a modern-day St. Vitus's dance break out spontaneously among the more devoted. At least half a dozen cases of Obamaniacs' getting the vapors and fainting from the rapture have been recorded.

Obama's apostles include his wife, Michelle, who insists she is "married to the only person in this race who has a chance at healing this nation." And why does Obama need to lay hands upon America? "We need a leader who's going to touch our souls because, you see, our souls are broken." He will demand much of us, she says. "The change Barack is talking about is hard, so don't get too excited, because Barack is going to demand that you, too, be different."

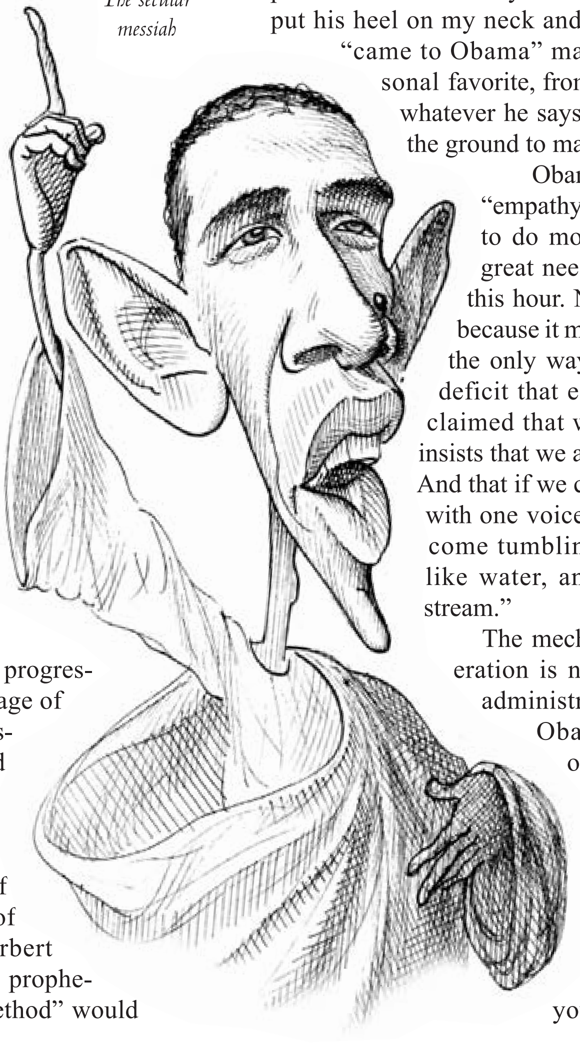
Much of the messianic language is more New Age than New Testament. "He is not operating on the same plane as ordinary politicians," says Gary Hart, who describes Obama as "the agent of transformation in an age of revolution, as a figure uniquely qualified to open the door to the 21st century." Deepak Chopra, guru to the rich and gullible, exults that an Obama victory would bring about "a quantum leap in American consciousness," while prominent "leadership coach" Eve Konstantine assures us that the highest expression of the collective American soul has finally materialized: "Barack Obama is our collective representation of our purest hopes, our highest visions and our deepest knowings. . . . He's our product out of the all-knowing quantum field of intelligence."

Most famously, Oprah Winfrey insists that Barack is The One—because we don't simply need politicians who can tell the truth, "we need politicians who know how to *be* the truth." King's College political scientist David Innes notes the similarity to Jesus's "messianic claim to divinity" in John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Winfrey does not get that explicitly religious. Rather, she claims that Obama will help us "evolve to a higher plane." She loves Obama because "he is an evolved leader who can bring evolved leadership to our country."

This conviction that Obama will take America to the next level, that he will hasten the march of progress, is infectious. The excitable Ezra Klein speaks for many who've been ignited by Obama's spark, writing for *The American Prospect*: "Obama's finest speeches do not excite. They do not inform. They don't even really inspire. They *elevate*. They enmesh you in a grander moment, as if history has stopped flowing passively by, and, just for an instant, contracted around you, made you aware of its presence, and your role in it. He is not the Word made flesh, but the triumph of word *over* flesh, over color, over despair." Obama is the truth, Obama is the way, and he promises that—with your help—he can "create a kingdom right here on earth."

A MESSIAH'S BEGETTING

As creepy as all this is, it's hardly unprecedented. When Obama won the "Chesapeake primary," he held a victory rally at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. "And where better to affirm our ideals than here in Wisconsin, where a century ago the progressive movement was born?" Obama proclaimed. He may not have realized how fitting his rhetorical question was. The progressives, too, believed they were poised to transcend. They too spoke of politics in religious terms and of religion in political terms. Richard Ely, the most influential progressive intellectual, long ensconced at the University of Wisconsin, believed that redemption was no longer an individual enterprise but a collective endeavor dependent upon the actions of the State. "In Ely's eyes," writes historian Jean B. Quandt, "government was the God-given instrument through which we had to work. . . . He thought of government as God's main instrument of redemption; and he defined the needed 'religious revival' in the cities as a deepening sense of ethical obligation on the part of the citizenry." Ely's postmillennial "Christian sociology" allowed him to cherry-pick both the Bible and Darwin to forge a kind of Marxist messianism in which both science and Scripture endorsed his "new nationalism."



The secular messiah

ROMAN GENN

Ely claimed to have come to his vision of religion via his study of economics.

In a complementary way, Walter Rauschenbusch, the leading social-gospel minister of the progressive era, came to his understanding of economics through religion. "Our disorganized competitive life must pass into an organic cooperative life," he insisted. "Unless the ideal social order can supply men with food, warmth and comfort more efficiently than our present economic order, back we shall go to Capitalism. . . . The God that answereth by low food prices, let him be God."

These were not fringe views among progressives. This vision was central to the new age of collectivism that both priests and professors saw arising either from the cold impersonal forces of history or with the guiding hand of God. "We believe," a social-gospel organization announced confidently in 1914, "that the age of sheer individualism is past and the age of social responsibility has arrived." Herbert Croly, the founder of *The New Republic*, prophesied that adherents of the "scientific method" would need to join with the "ideologists" of Christ, in order "to plan and to effect a redeeming transformation" of society whereby men would look for "deliverance from choice between unredeemed capitalism and revolutionary salvation."

For a time, the Barack Obama of the progressive era was none other than Teddy Roosevelt. At the 1912 Progressive-party convention, described by the *New York Times* as a "convention of fanatics," speeches were punctuated by the singing of hymns and shouts of "Amen!" "It was not a convention at all," the *Times* reported. "It was an assemblage of religious enthusiasts. It was such a convention as Peter the Hermit held. It was a Methodist camp meeting done over into political terms." The delegates sang "We Will Follow Jesus," but with the name "Roosevelt" replacing the now-outdated savior. Roosevelt told the rapturous audience, "Our cause is based on the eternal principles of righteousness. . . . We stand at Armageddon, and we battle for the Lord."

Compare all of this with Obamania. His followers believe that he will be the instrument by which we evolve to a higher, more cooperative level. His cult of personality surpasses that of John F. Kennedy (at least during JFK's life) and rivals TR's. William Allen White, the famed progressive writer, recalled in 1934 that he'd been "a young arrogant protagonist of the divine rule of the plutocracy" until Roosevelt "shattered the foundations of my political ideals. As they crumbled then and there, politically, I put his heel on my neck and I became his man." Those who "came to Obama" make similar declarations. A personal favorite, from the actress Halle Berry: "I'll do whatever he says to do. I'll collect paper cups off the ground to make his pathway clear."

Obama himself promises to close the "empathy deficit" by requiring Americans to do more for each other. "Unity is the great need of the hour—the great need of this hour. Not because it sounds pleasant or because it makes us feel good, but because it's the only way we can overcome the essential deficit that exists in this country." TR proclaimed that we were at Armegeddon; Obama insists that we are like Joshua's troops at Jericho. And that if we could "stand together" and "speak with one voice," the walls of injustice "would come tumbling down, and justice would flow like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream."

The mechanism for this new era of cooperation is not civil society, but the Obama administration—or, more accurately, the Obama "movement." "We are the ones we've been waiting for" is one of Obama's stump refrains. We can arrive at this new state of consciousness by—what else?—believing in Obama. The banner at his website reads: "I'm asking you to believe." Of course, *you* need not believe, but if enough of your fellow citizens believe, then their belief will become your reality, whether you like it or not.

Religion, according to Obama, “tells us about our obligations to one another.” Fair enough, but he also thinks that religion tells us what kind of government we need to have. “If changing our hearts and minds is the first critical step, we cannot stop there,” Obama declared at Ebenezer Baptist Church. “It is not enough to bemoan the plight of poor children in this country and remain unwilling to push our elected officials to provide the resources to fix our schools. It is not enough to decry the disparities of health care and yet allow the insurance companies and the drug companies to block much-needed reforms. . . . The Scripture tells us that we are judged not just by word, but by deed.”

“Obama speaks as if the first move of someone faithful to God’s word is to call for government action, not to act directly through his or her own charitable efforts,” writes Joseph Knippenberg, an Oglethorpe University political scientist and close student of Obama’s religious rhetoric. “Those who don’t engage in political action of the sort he approves are apparently hypocrites, satisfied with mere words.” Obama’s “awesome God,” writes Knippenberg, “is a thoroughgoing, card-carrying Democrat.” In other words, let the God that answereth with single-payer health care be God.

NEW AGE GNOSIS

Two points need to be made here. First, Obama’s stance that his religious conviction is also a political mandate is not unique to him. It is, in fact, the dogma of the Democratic party, though until fairly recently Democrats had a difficult time expressing it. In 2004, John Kerry explained that his faith requires him to support the welfare state, environmentalism, civil rights, etc. “I think that everything you do in public life has to be guided by your faith, affected by your faith, but without transferring it in any official way to other people.” But he also said, “I believe that I can’t legislate or transfer to another American citizen my article of faith. What is an article of faith for me is not something that I can legislate on somebody who doesn’t share that article of faith.” This bit, of course, is the standard pro-choice catechism all Democrats are obliged to recite. But Kerry, like most Democrats, appears incapable of appreciating the cognitive dissonance here. If your faith guides your left-wing policies on, say, property rights, then how is seizing someone’s home or wealth any less an example of “legislating your faith” on others? But, for the foreseeable future, the pro-choice God shall be the God of the Democratic party.

Second, there is the question “*Why?*” The messianic nature of progressive politics in general and Obama in particular has gotten a thorough airing of late, but less discussed is why progres-

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sivism has that nature. A good place to start such an investigation would be the pages of NATIONAL REVIEW during the Cold War. For decades, many of this magazine's greatest contributors—Willmoore Kendall, Russell Kirk, and, of course, William F. Buckley Jr.—debated the extent to which liberalism was a political religion kindred to the totalitarianisms of the 20th century. These writers were deeply indebted to the German émigré philosopher Eric Voegelin, who argued that progressivism—the more precise label for modern liberalism—was part of the same ideological garment as Europe's authoritarian movements.

Voegelin argued that progressivism, like other political religions, manifested itself as a form of gnosticism. In both its ancient and modern forms, gnosticism has two core assumptions. First, it condemns the existing world as broken and alienating, plagued by evil forces preventing a complete and happy restoration of man's spiritual and material life. In other words—Michelle Obama's in fact—the world is a place of broken souls. But the gnostic promise, to borrow a phrase from John Edwards, is that "it doesn't have to be this way." Enter the second core assumption: Gnostic political religions promise (in Russell Kirk's words) "a mode of deliverance or salvation from the prison of the world for man through a secret gnosis." That is, with just the right mixture of abracadabra words and prestidigitatory politics we can create a "kingdom of heaven on earth"—not coincidentally, a phrase invoked by Bolsheviks, progressives, fascists, and every other variety of utopian collectivist. This effort to lasso the hereafter and pull it down to the here-and-now was dubbed by Voegelin "immanentizing the eschaton." ("Don't immanentize the eschaton" was a popular button among WFB's readers).

Obamania is doomed to fail for the same reason all such movements are doomed to failure: You can't create a heaven on earth.

What is this gnosis, this secret knowledge that can usher in a perfect world? That varies. For the Marxists, the secret lay in the intricacies of "scientific socialism." With just the right manipulation of material or historical forces we could—ta-da!—create a land where each lives according to his need. For the Marxist, Voegelin quipped, "Christ the Redeemer is replaced by the steam engine as the promise of the realm to come." For the progressives, the trick was giving ourselves over to the social planners and gnostic "ideologists of Christ." And today, the secret is Barack Obama. For some that is quite literally true. A group called Bring Us Change has released a video in which children testify about the dire state of the world. "In this time of great despair has come a great gift," explains a narrator, who appears to be about six or seven years old. When she says this, the video cuts to a baby opening a copy of *The Audacity of Hope*, complete with a whispery spirit voice promising a "secret." The video concludes with one child after another announcing that the secret is—Barack Obama.

The makers of this creepy agitprop, not to mention Obama himself, know little to nothing about the intellectual precursors of their political religion. And that is a major theme of Voegelin's argument. Utopian desires are part of the human condition, and the craving to create a heaven on earth is the inevitable consequence of a godless society. "Totalitarianism, defined as the existential rule of Gnostic activists, is the end form of progressive civilization," Voegelin insisted. Indeed, the story of totalitarianism is the story of men trying to replace the allegedly discredited old God with one of their own creation. "When God is invisible behind the world," Voegelin writes, "the contents of the world will become new gods; when the symbols of transcendent religiosity are banned, new symbols develop from the inner-worldly language of science to take their place." This purely political "science" becomes, in effect, the new faith dedicated to the "redivinization of society." Which explains liberals' oddly passionate reactions when faced with conservative disagreement. Those who take the slogan "If you're not part of the solution then you're part of the problem" as a spiritual imperative (whether they see it as spiritual or not) are inclined to take disagreement or apathy not as dissent, but as heresy.

Moreover, when God is no longer the measure of man, man—or mankind—becomes the object of worship. (It shouldn't surprise us that Herbert Croly, the indispensable intellectual of modern liberalism, was literally baptized into Auguste Comte's "Religion of Humanity," in which great scientists and statesmen were designated "saints.") When there is no power other than "people power," worship of people power becomes the new faith. Members of the movement worship themselves. Or, in Voegelin's words, they "build the *corpus mysticum* of the collectivity and bind the members to form the oneness of the body." Or again, in Barack Obama's words, we quite become the ones we've been waiting for. There is where progressivism meets populism. Populism, after all, is ultimately a form of narcissism in which an individual's self-regard and self-pity are multiplied by the population of the mob. *My* grievances become *our* grievances, and the satisfaction of grievance is the only true measure of what is right. As Willie Stark says to the masses in *All the King's Men*, "Your will is my strength, and your need is my justice." In a rightly ordered society, such sentiments are better directed toward God than toward a throng of angry supplicants.

Obamania is doomed to fail for the same reason all such movements are doomed to failure: You can't create a heaven on earth. You can't immanentize the eschaton. The perfect life, if it exists at all, must be found in the next life. But even though utopian dreams are forever out of reach, there's no reason for us to assume that people won't always strive for them. Such is both the audacity, and the folly, of hope. **NR**

■ THE NATION

‘He’s No Jeb Bush’

Charlie Crist—ambiguous conservative, potential vice president

JOHN J. MILLER

When the Florida legislature finished its spring session last year, Republican governor Charlie Crist hailed lawmakers for what he considered their most important accomplishment: “You put the nail in the coffin this afternoon on the industry that was hurting our people.”

He was talking about the insurance industry, which seems to have chosen an odd way to hurt Floridians. It spent more than $30 billion to meet its policy obligations and help rebuild the Sunshine State, in the wake of seven big hurricanes that smashed the state’s shores in 2004 and 2005.

Anybody who has dealt with claims adjusters knows they can be unpleasant. Crist, however, didn’t merely express frustration with insurance companies—he decided to give John Edwards a run for his money in the contest for the year’s most flamboyantly anti-business rhetoric. “I am amazed at their level of greed and I am amazed at the callous nature of their corporate decisions,” he told the *St. Petersburg Times* last summer.

Coming from a guy who’s normally smiling and upbeat, these were harsh words. Yet they’ve struck a populist chord and today, a little more than a year into his first term as Jeb Bush’s successor, Crist enjoys sky-high approval ratings: 71 percent, according to a February poll. He finds himself on the verge of national prominence, as a possible running mate for John McCain.

“I don’t have an interest in the vice presidency,” he told me on February 13, but he’s bound to make McCain’s short list anyway. Many Republicans believe that Crist’s last-minute endorsement allowed McCain to nip Mitt Romney in Florida, putting the Arizona senator on a glide path to the GOP nomination.

In some ways, Crist’s candidacy would make a lot of sense: He’d all but lock up Florida, a state McCain can’t afford to lose in November. He also has a strong record on crime, taxes, and spending. But is he the battle-tested conservative that so many in the Republican base believe McCain ought to pick?

The 51-year-old Crist is of Greek ancestry—the family name was Christodoulos before his father shortened it. He’s bronze-skinned, silver-haired, and wafer-thin. A Pennsylvania native, he grew up in Florida and left for Wake Forest, where he played on the football team’s practice squad for two years. Crist finished his degree at Florida State and attended the Cumberland School of Law in Alabama. He flunked the bar twice before passing it (as smirking rivals like to mention). Around this time, he married his college girlfriend. They divorced half a year later, and he’s been single ever since.

In the art of retail politics, Crist is a grand master. He’s warm and affable in person. He likes to listen as much as he likes to talk, and he’s been known to give out his cellphone number to constituents he’s just met. “He’s probably the most brilliant campaigner I’ve ever been around,” says congressman Tom Feeney, a Florida Republican. “He remembers names like nobody else.”

The governor also has a nose for feel-good publicity. A few weeks before he was sworn in, he read a story in the *Miami Herald* about Kevin Estinfil, a disabled twelve-year-old who needs special thermal blankets to stay alive because his body can’t regulate its own temperature. A state office had spent thousands of dollars in legal fees to deny a claim for the blankets, which would have cost $360 per year. Crist cut a personal check for that amount and visited the boy. When the head of the tight-fisted agency announced her resignation, it hardly seemed like a coincidence—and Crist came off as “the people’s governor,” as he likes to call himself.

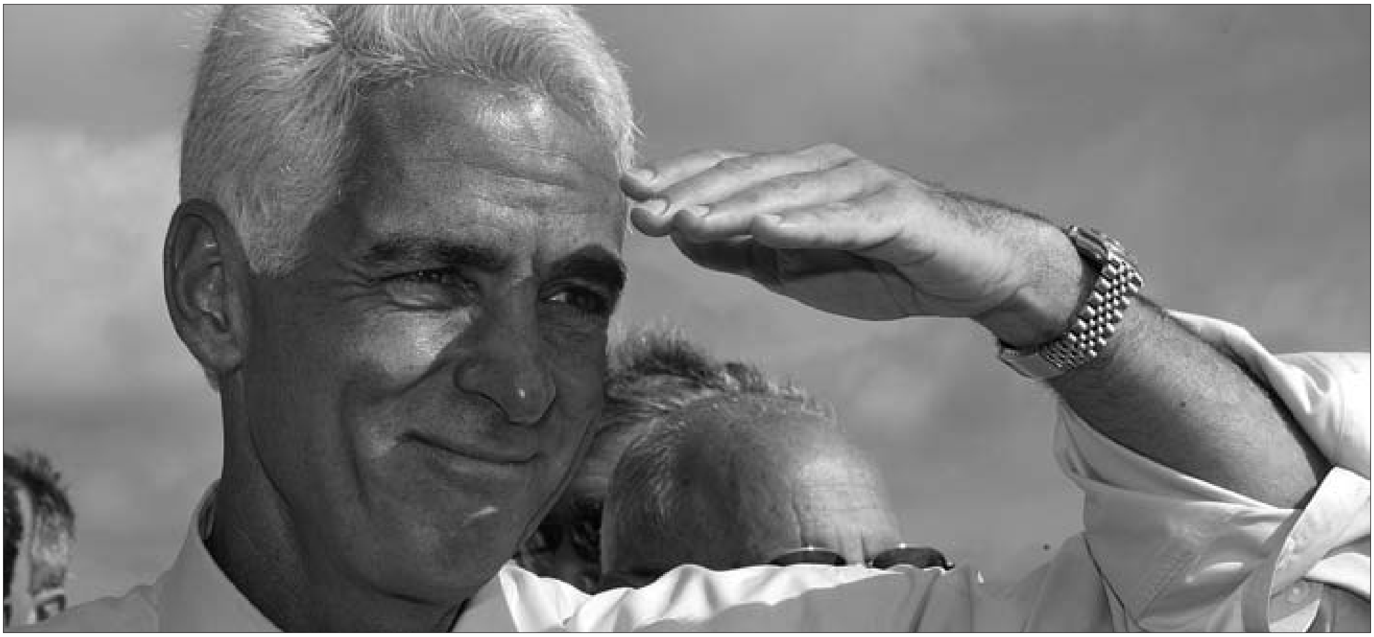
Crist first eyed public office more than two decades ago. In 1986, he ran for the state senate and lost. Not long after, a newspaper published his letter to the editor urging Republicans to unite behind Connie Mack, a conservative who was running for the U.S. Senate. “We read the letter but had no idea who Charlie was,” says Mitch Bainwol, who was Mack’s campaign manager at the time. Bainwol tracked down Crist and persuaded him to join the cause. After Mack triumphed, Crist was his state director.

Yet he still wanted to win his own election. His next foray was more successful: He captured a state-senate seat in 1992 and was re-elected to a new term. Since then, he’s sought one statewide office after another. In 1998, he ran a kamikaze campaign against Democratic senator Bob Graham. Crist lost badly, but increased his name recognition among Republicans. Then came a string of victories—for state education commissioner in 2000, attorney general in 2002, and, finally, governor in 2006. Conveniently, the state legislature recently repealed a resign-to-run law that would have required Crist to quit his job in Tallahassee to seek a federal office. Now he can legally serve as governor and as the Republican nominee for vice president at the same time.

Throughout his career, Crist has demonstrated a talent for spotting and exploiting niche issues. As a state senator, he proposed that prisoners work in shackled crews. Opponents mocked him as “Chain Gang Charlie.” Their name-calling backfired, however, as Crist embraced the term and even used it in campaign ads. Later, he criticized Florida Atlantic University for sponsoring a play that depicts Jesus as a gay man. As attorney general he blasted Medicaid for letting sex offenders acquire Viagra, and his complaints prompted a change in federal policy. In each case, he earned headlines and conservative approval.

Despite these gestures, many conservatives have harbored doubts about Crist. “He’s no Jeb Bush,” says one Republican congressman who isn’t from Florida. “There’s no way you can be as popular as he is and be doing anything hard.” Some of Crist’s biggest fans don’t belong to his party. Democratic state senator Dave Aronberg has called him “one of the best Democratic governors Florida has ever had,” according to the *St. Petersburg Times*. Last year, at a gala sponsored by the legislature’s black caucus, state representative Terry Fields exalted Crist with language that echoed a phrase often used to describe Bill Clinton: “Don’t you think he's Florida's first black governor?" The Associated Press reported that "the crowd erupted in applause."

A main reason for this left-leaning group's celebration of Crist was his support for what was one of its top legislative priorities: the restoration of voting rights for felons. During the recount controversy of 2000, many liberal civil-rights organizations argued that a law denying the vote to ex-cons was discriminatory, in that it disproportionately affected blacks (and perhaps even played a decisive role in George W. Bush's defeat of Al Gore). Restoration of voting rights was possible for non-violent offenders by a special process of petition. Democrats, however, sought to make it more or less automatic, and Crist helped them meet their goal. "I believe in forgiveness and atonement," he says. Polls suggest that most of the public opposed the reform. "I don't know many people who would say that the problem with our democracy is that there aren't enough ex-criminals voting," says a major Florida conservative.



Gov. Charlie Crist

NEWSCOM

More troubling may be Crist's views on abortion. "I am pro-choice," he said a decade ago. "I believe that a woman has the right to choose." As a member of a key committee in the state senate, he cast the deciding vote against a bill that would have required a 24-hour waiting period for women seeking abortions. During the GOP gubernatorial primary in 2006, Crist's main opponent, Tom Gallagher, tried to get to Crist's right on social issues but suffered from his own credibility problems. Crist beat him, and then defeated Democratic congressman Jim Davis in the general election.

Today, Crist calls himself pro-life. "I changed my mind," he says. "I think it's important to protect the sanctity of life." Unlike Mitt Romney, Crist has no story about how and why his beliefs changed. "It's just a maturation of my views," he says. Does he believe *Roe* v. *Wade* was wrongly decided? "No. I don't think it should be overturned. I'm not running for the Supreme Court." Can he think of a single new restriction he would place upon abortion in Florida? "No. I'm comfortable with the status quo. So are most Floridians." He goes on to say that he has supported tax incentives for adoption.

"Social issues make him very uncomfortable," notes one Florida Republican. During his campaign for governor, Crist signed a petition in support of a ballot initiative to amend the state constitution to ban gay marriage—a cause that the state GOP had backed financially. Since taking office, however, Crist has opposed further party donations to advance the initiative. "It's a good idea and I'll vote for it," he says, "but it's not a front-burner issue for me." He has called himself a "live-and-let-live kind of guy," and says that civil unions for gays are fine.

Another campaign promise involved gambling: "I oppose the expansion of gambling," he said. As governor, however, he has presided over what the *Miami Herald* has called an "unmistakable march toward more ways to gamble at more places for more hours with more money." Racetracks now have extra slot machines and longer hours, and ATMs are closer to gambling dens. Crist also would like the state to offer additional lotto games, ticket machines, and promotional billboards. "I don't view this as an expansion," he says. "I guess it's in the eye of the beholder."

He points out that additional income from gambling will help the state's bottom line—and on fiscal matters, his overall record is good. In January, he successfully pushed an initiative that will cut property taxes. Moreover, he has kept the lid on state spending. Shortly after becoming governor, he used his line-item veto to slice $459 million from Tallahassee's budget. Both the budget he went on to approve and the one he has proposed this year are roughly the same size as the final budget of Jeb Bush's last term, about $70 billion. This is partly because state revenues have dropped. Given Florida's continual population growth, it's nevertheless an impressive accomplishment.

Yet storm clouds loom on the horizon, thanks to Crist's other actions. "He socialized our state's insurance market," says Dennis Ross, a Republican state representative. "He's doing everything he can to run insurance companies out of Florida." One of the hottest political issues of 2006, when Crist was in the thick of his governor’s race, involved insurance premiums. They were shooting up because companies were paying out so much in the aftermath of those hurricanes. “Rates were going through the roof,” says the governor. “We experienced price gouging. I’m a consumer advocate. I fight for the little guy. Sometimes big business can be as bad as big government and become arrogant, sloth-like, and detrimental.”

To address the problem, Crist imposed de facto price controls that have turned the Citizens Property Insurance Corporation, essentially a state agency, into Florida’s largest provider of homeowner’s insurance. Several other measures have also hobbled market forces. “This plan violates every principle of actuarial soundness,” says a prominent Florida Republican. The result is that taxpayers are now on the hook if a violent tempest slashes its way across the state in the next few years. “This is a huge gamble,” says Eli Lehrer of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a free-market think tank.

Crist’s reforms were enough to compel a response from Jeb Bush, who had kept quiet about his successor until last September. At a speech in Texas, Bush criticized states for “offering solutions that are as bad as the natural disasters themselves,” and observed that “my beloved state of Florida has taken steps along this path.” The former governor also lauded the efforts of state representatives Ross and Donald Brown, the only members of the legislature to oppose the plan. Crist was less appreciative: Both Ross and Brown were stripped of their committee chairmanships. “Should we have state-run mortgages? State-run auto-insurance policies? I don’t mean to sound ludicrous, but that’s the mentality we’re fighting,” says Ross. In February, when State Farm announced that it wouldn’t write any new homeowner’s insurance policies in Florida, Crist was almost gleeful: “Good riddance to anybody who is not treating the people of Florida right.”

Some global-warming enthusiasts have tried to connect the prevalence of hurricanes with human-induced climate change. Crist has gone along, making the link in his 2007 “state of the state” address. The governor has pushed for a series of caps on greenhouse gases. He wants a 22 percent reduction in auto emissions by 2012, for instance. As a result, he has become one of liberalism’s pet Republicans. Crist goes out of his way to discuss the environment with the likes of Sheryl Crow, whose hit songs include “My Favorite Mistake.”

He also sponsored a major conference on global warming in Miami last year. On its first day, environmental crusader Robert F. Kennedy Jr. gave a keynote address. He blasted Republicans who have “torn the ‘conserve’ out of ‘conservatism’” and praised Crist for his “leadership.” Kennedy’s speech—along with remarks by activists from the Environmental Defense Fund and the Sierra Club—are viewable on Crist’s gubernatorial website. “Look at the geography and topography of our state. We’re a giant peninsula,” says Crist. “Rising sea levels would impact us. We have to address this problem.”

On March 11, Crist explained the source of his passion: “Do you know who first introduced me to the idea of climate change? It was John McCain.”

Conservatives are likely to want a little more balance on the GOP presidential ticket. If McCain decides to spurn them, he would be smart to buy some disaster insurance beforehand. **NR**

■ THE NATION II

The Buckeye Stops Here

It’s not foreigners who are hurting Ohio’s economy

STEPHEN SPRUIELL

Cincinnati, Ohio

‘WHAT about that pillow?” I ask Standard Textile CEO Gary Heiman, pointing to an inviting cushion lying on a metal table amid a pile of multicolored scraps and samples.

Heiman nods, and the grinning VP in charge of product development standing next to him grabs the pillow off the table. “The pillowcase is just a normal pillowcase,” he says, “but feel the pillow itself.” I do. It feels like it’s been in a refrigerator. “Sixty-eight degrees,” the grinning VP says. “We can actually set the temperature of this fabric through the manufacturing process.”

The cool pillow is just one of several cutting-edge products I’m shown during my tour of the R&D lab at Standard Textile’s Cincinnati headquarters. Two days have passed since the Ohio primary, and I’m here because after listening to Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton attack each other all week for being insufficiently opposed to free trade, I wanted to meet the Ohioan who wrote the sentence, “Rather than banking on high-powered lobbyists to stave off the march of globalization, we welcome the end of [import] quotas.”

That sentence can be found in an op-ed Heiman wrote for the *Washington Post* in 2005 titled “Innovation, Not Quotas,” in which he called on the American textile industry to stop asking the government to protect it from import competition. Compare his attitude to the one expressed by eight out of ten Ohioans who voted in the Democratic primary, and who told exit pollsters that U.S. trade with other countries “loses jobs.”

FREE TRADE ISN’T THE PROBLEM

“That entire notion is nonsense,” Heiman says. Trade takes the blame when people lose their jobs because it’s an “easy target,” he says, absolving shortsighted industry leaders and labor unions when companies run into financial trouble and jobs are eliminated. Rather than take responsibility for failing to adapt, “it’s much easier to say, ‘It’s their fault. It’s China’s fault. The Chinese are taking away our jobs,’ when in fact, that’s just not the case,” he says, citing five years of consistently low U.S. unemployment rates.

While other basic industries “expected the government to protect them from foreign competition,” he says, his company embraced trade, tapped into foreign markets, and doubled the number of workers it employs, both in Ohio and in the U.S., over the past ten years. “We understood the map,” he says, “and we expanded so that today we have about 23 manufacturing facilities in 13 countries, including seven manufacturing facilities in the United States."

Standard Textile's U.S. manufacturing centers are not in Ohio—they are located in the southeastern United States, the traditional home of the U.S. textile industry, where Heiman bought defunct mills from bankrupt companies and refurbished them. But as his company grew its manufacturing operations in the U.S. and overseas, it added hundreds of product-development, logistics, customer-service, and finance jobs at its Ohio headquarters.

Standard Textile is just one example of a company that is growing and creating high-paying service jobs in Ohio thanks to open markets here and abroad. Its home city, Cincinnati, has added more than enough service jobs over the last five years to offset its relatively minor job losses in the manufacturing sector. To the north, however, in cities like Cleveland, Youngstown, and Canton, manufacturing-job losses have taken a heavier toll.

Like many Democratic politicians before them, Obama and Clinton cynically took advantage of the pain felt in northeastern Ohio by making a lot of empty promises about trade on the campaign trail. Some of these promises—including the pledge to opt out of the North American Free Trade Agreement if it could not be renegotiated on terms more favorable to American workers—were emptier than others.

In the days leading up to the March 4 Ohio primary, Obama's presidential campaign aired a TV ad that featured a man named Steven Schuyler standing in front of a Delphi Packard Electric plant in Warren, Ohio. In the ad, Schuyler says he worked for Delphi, an automotive supplier, for 13 years until NAFTA enabled the company to ship his job to Mexico. "Barack Obama was against NAFTA," Schuyler says, adding, "We need a president that will bring work into this country."

Of course, the reality is that the problems with Delphi—and with Ohio's manufacturing sector in general—have very little to do with NAFTA. In 2005, Delphi filed for bankruptcy protection and initiated a corporate restructuring. The company, a wholly owned subsidiary of General Motors until it was spun off as an independent supplier in 1999, inherited GM's high-wage, high-benefit union contracts. It found that its competitors in the supply business were operating under no such constraints. Lindsey Williams, a spokesman for Delphi, says, "No other suppliers were paying the wages and offering the benefit packages we were."

Even with these legacy costs, Delphi might have managed. But its relationship with GM harmed it in other ways. When Delphi declared bankruptcy, GM was its biggest customer, responsible for about 50 percent of its sales. When GM's market share tanked in 2003, so did Delphi's profits. Delphi's fate and the fates of its U.S. employees are tied to the fate of GM, which for multiple reasons has struggled, along with Ford and Chrysler, to stay afloat in recent years.

THE COMPETITION IS HERE

Robert S. "Steve" Miller, the CEO of Delphi when it declared bankruptcy, has some experience managing distressed companies. His previous jobs included CEO of Bethlehem Steel and board member at United Airlines. Addressing reporters in 2005 on the subject of the Delphi bankruptcy, he analyzed the painful transformations occurring within each of the industries he's worked for (steel, airlines, and autos), and argued that import competition wasn't the primary force driving any of them to change.

"In the steel industry," Miller said, "we were being run off the road, not so much by imports, but by domestic competitors such as Nucor and Steel Dynamics." (These companies operate "mini-mills" that are more flexible and less costly than the large, integrated mills Bethlehem Steel operated.) "They paid equally good wages," he added, "but needed half the labor hours per ton to do the same job."

In the airline industry, Miller said, "Delta and Northwest were shot down by JetBlue and Southwest, not Air India or Air China. Worker productivity is a big part of the difference."

And in the auto industry, Miller pointed out, "Toyota, Nissan, and Honda are competing from assembly plants in our back yard, but without the crippling work rules and social costs embedded in [GM, Ford, and Chrysler's] labor contracts." The example of Honda is particularly relevant to any examination of Ohio's economy. The Japanese automaker opened its first plant in Ohio in 1979, and since then it has opened three more and become one of the state's top employers. Workers in Honda's Ohio plants don't belong to a union, but the company pays competitive wages and benefits and has never laid off any of its Ohio employees.

"In each case," Miller said, "the old oligopoly has crumbled, not so much from globalization, but from upstart domestic competition." Standard Textile's Gary Heiman, the upstart competition in his old-line industry, couldn't have said it any better himself.

As for Delphi Packard Electric in Warren, Ohio, it was downsized as part of the corporate restructuring, but—unlike other Delphi plants in the U.S.—it wasn't shuttered or sold. All but 700 of the plant's 3,800 employees took buyout offers or early retirement. Those who stayed on accepted a new labor contract that brought wages and benefits closer to the prevailing rates in the supply business.

In April 2007, the Youngstown *Vindicator* ran a story about a former Delphi employee named Karole Kowalski who took a $140,000 buyout and invested it in an associate's degree at Youngstown State University. "She's excited about her plan," according to the report, "and is hopeful the cutbacks at Packard were the best thing that could have happened to her. She couldn't work as a laborer any more because of her back, and the buyout has given her the chance to retrain."

If all ex–Delphi Packard workers were offered buyouts or early retirement, it stands to reason that Steven Schuyler, the man in the Obama TV ad, took a similar deal. The Obama campaign ignored NATIONAL REVIEW's requests for more information about Schuyler, but a Delphi retiree told the *Vindicator*, "Schuyler took the buyout and got a good cash sum to quit his job." When I spoke to *Vindicator* editor Todd Franko, he said he still hadn't been able to contact Schuyler to confirm this.

Whatever Schuyler's personal circumstances, nobody at Delphi lost his job because of NAFTA. As Miller pointed out in his remarks to reporters, "other U.S.-based suppliers, many of which were organized by the same unions . . . were paying less than half the automaker wages and benefits [that Delphi was paying]."

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

Contrary to Obama's ad, domestic competition played a bigger role in Delphi's downfall than did competition from overseas. But to the extent that trade *has* pressured companies and unions to renegotiate antiquated labor contracts, that's a good thing for consumers and for the U.S. economy. It might not be a popular message in union-dominated northeastern Ohio, but it is settled as a matter of economics.

The question isn't why Ohio has lost manufacturing jobs. The entire country has lost manufacturing jobs because companies have made enormous productivity gains, requiring fewer workers to make the same products. The question is: Why hasn't Ohio created non-manufacturing jobs as fast as the rest of the country (or even as fast as Cincinnati)? Between 2000 and 2007, Ohio lost only a slightly higher proportion of its manufacturing jobs than did the U.S. overall, but the U.S. experienced a net gain of around 7.5 million jobs over that period, while Ohio experienced a net loss of around 200,000.

Former Ohio secretary of state Ken Blackwell, a Republican who ran unsuccessfully for governor in 2006, blames Ohio's high taxes and onerous regulations. He was highly critical of the former governor, an unpopular Republican named Bob Taft, and complained that "Ohio Republicans . . . campaigned like Ronald Reagan and then governed like Jimmy Carter." Despite his attempts to distance himself from Taft, he lost to Democrat Ted Strickland by 24 points.

"At the end of the day, Ohioans want to work, they want jobs, and they want an expanding economy," Blackwell says. "John McCain knows as I know . . . that capital seeks the path of least resistance and greatest opportunity. Ohio's regulatory environment, its tax climate, and the general cost of doing business is non-competitive, and as a consequence we're losing capital and losing jobs."

Federal Reserve economists Mark Schweitzer and Paul Bauer might put it a different way: Ohio is losing innovators. According to the *Toledo Blade*, Schweitzer and Bauer did an analysis on why some states' economies outperform others, and found that a surprisingly important metric was the number of patents per capita. Since 1954, Ohio has fallen from sixth to 20th in this measurement of a state's ability to generate new ideas.

No one needs to explain the importance of innovation to Gary Heiman at Standard Textile, or to his employees in the R&D lab, hard at work on the next generation of synthetic fabrics. At the company's headquarters, Heiman escorts me into a realistic facsimile of a hospital operating room. Everything is draped in sea-green fabric.

"Around 20 years ago, all of the fabric used in major surgeries was just thrown out," he explains. He tells me how his company set out to create a fabric capable of resisting fluids and surviving the harsh wash-cycles that surgical sheets and gowns would need to undergo. "We did that," he says. "And today about 25 percent of [what hospitals in the U.S. use] is reusable."

"And that was before the environmental movement not to throw this stuff out really took off," he says, admiring a row of sea-green surgical gowns. "The way I see it, we're just going to ride that wave all the way up." **NR**

■ **PEOPLE II**

Florian's World

On the writer and director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, maker of *The Lives of Others*

JAY NORDLINGER

Two years ago, something extraordinary appeared: a movie called *The Lives of Others*, or, in its original German, *Das Leben der Anderen*. It was a great movie, a genuine artistic achievement. But it was also something even rarer: an honest, illuminating depiction of life in a Communist police state. Those who know such states could scarcely believe their eyes; some had thought they would never see an honest depiction onscreen.

The film is about a dedicated Stasi man, which is to say, a member of the East German secret police. As he goes about his work, listening in on his targets, he has a revolution of conscience: and winds up being a lifesaver.

This movie was appreciated by more than a select few; it was honored by one and all. *The Lives of Others* won virtually every award available, including the Oscar for Best Foreign-Language Film. On seeing it, William F. Buckley Jr. declared it just about the best movie he had ever seen. Many of us felt similarly. And I was able to sit down not long ago with the writer and director of this amazing picture.

His full name is Florian Maria Georg Christian Graf Henckel von Donnersmarck. But you can shorten that aristocratic mouthful to Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck. He was born in 1973, in Cologne. He now lives in Los Angeles with his wife, a copyright lawyer, and their three children.

For a man relatively young, he has done a lot, and seen a lot—and thought a lot. His father was an executive with Lufthansa; his mother was a sociologist and book scout. When Florian was two, they moved to New York City—in fact, to Roosevelt Island. The Donnersmarcks were one of the first "normal" families to live on that once-forlorn island, formerly known as Welfare Island (and worse). It had been a place of asylums and the like. Florian's family was actually featured on television—it was his first appearance on the small screen. And he had an idyllic time on Roosevelt Island, tripping through parks and the ruins of those asylums.

When he was eight, the family moved to West Berlin—another island, really, an enclave within a Communist country. When Florian was taken to the Wall, he thought it was some kind of art installation. (His mother was an aficionada of art.) But he soon learned its meaning, and loathed its meaning. The family traveled from time to time in East Germany, and Florian remembered those glimpses—he incorporated them into *The Lives of Others*. In

Mr. Nordlinger is an NR senior editor. Pieces like this can be found in *Here, There & Everywhere: Collected Writings of Jay Nordlinger*. Go to Store.NationalReview.com.

addition, he set his film in a year during which his family lived in Berlin: 1984 (portentous year in any case).

Florian finished high school in yet another city, Brussels. And then he did something very much out of the ordinary: He went to Russia—rather, the Soviet Union—to study. The year was 1991, shortly after the coup against Gorbachev failed. Florian had always loved things Russian: literature, history, art. So he went to Leningrad, to learn the language and immerse himself in its literature. While there, he also did some charitable work with the Order of Malta: starting up soup kitchens, feeding the poor. After two years, he earned a diploma, qualifying him to teach Russian as a foreign language. The diploma was adorned with a hammer and sickle: The Soviet Union had expired, but old habits died hard.

I might mention, now, that Donnersmarck is a polyglot: He speaks French, Italian, and English, in addition to Russian and his native German. And he is spending a lot of time just now listening to English—American English—in L.A. He has his ear cocked for idioms, inflections, nuances. His current screenplay is in English.

After Russia, he went to Oxford, to study politics, philosophy, and economics. In 1994, who should show up but one Mikhail S. Gorbachev? And what Russian-speaking student should have been chosen to guide him around? Donnersmarck reports that the former Soviet leader was immensely personable, and keenly interested in what he was seeing. He would ask that students be called over to him, for a discussion; and they would be flabbergasted.

LOOKING TO MOVIES

During Donnersmarck's time at Oxford, Richard Attenborough, the famed film director, came for a visiting professorship. Donnersmarck had thought of himself as a novelist: That is what he would become. But it was dawning on him that "maybe my challenge was to try to give people the same psychological depth in a film that they would normally get only from a novel." Could he do in just a couple of hours what a novel can do in 50, or 100?

Attenborough announced a competition: an essay competition on "Why Film Is My Chosen Medium." The winners would be interns on his next film, *In Love and War*. "I dropped all my academic duties for two weeks," says Donnersmarck, "and wrote my essay." He was one of the three winners. And his experience on the Attenborough film was formative, making him think "I'll never accept a lower professional standard than this."

Attenborough encouraged him to go to film school. So he did, in Munich. Donnersmarck himself is not a great believer in film schools. "I don't think that going made me a better director at all." The craft of filmmaking is no big issue, he says; you don't need a film school for that. But such a school is "a great excuse to see a lot of films that interest you, and maybe see them multiple times, and to talk to other people about films."

I have mentioned the influence of Russian culture on Donnersmarck. But there have been other influences, of course: German and Austrian literature, for example. He cites in particular Freud, Zweig, Mann, and Arthur Schnitzler. He also mentions the American film director Elia Kazan, who, with his actor, Brando, "freed cinema." Donnersmarck calls Kazan "a great artist and a real thinker," who went about his work "very, very conscientiously." He regards Kazan's memoirs as "possibly the best nonfiction book I've ever read." The book gave him courage, he says, to admit his own "weaknesses and troubles." It would do the same for other readers.

While in the Munich film school, Donnersmarck made a short-action film called *Dobermann*. It was just four minutes, and included no dialogue, but the film took off: being sold to television, winning awards all over the world (in a rehearsal for *The Lives of Others*). Donnersmarck was able to live off that little flick for two years, traveling abroad to festivals, collecting his awards. This is exceedingly rare. And, naturally, he started to think about a full-length feature.

"How did the idea for *The Lives of Others* come about?" people ask. And Donnersmarck has an answer. Lenin was famously opposed to listening to music. (Reagan liked to cite this fact.) He thought that music would soften him, when he had to remain hard, to make his omelet (which was never to materialize, of course). Donnersmarck mused about forcing stereo headphones on Lenin, making him listen to music, whether he wanted to or not. And then came a related idea: What if a committed secret policeman were forced to listen, through headphones, to free-minded, liberal, democratic people? And that is what the Stasi man in the movie—Wiesler—does.

Donnersmarck wrote his script. He offered it to every single distributor in Germany, but there were no takers. "This is too intellectual," people said, "no one will want to see the movie." Donnersmarck would counterargue: "Maybe you're underestimating people. Maybe you're not offering films that they would enjoy seeing." Undaunted, he went about assembling the best of everything for his film: the best of everything as he saw it. He got the actors he wanted, the composer he wanted, and so on. He convinced them to work for relatively little money. And, without a distributor, they went ahead and shot the film.

Even with the film in the can, there were no takers—save one: Buena Vista (a division of Walt Disney). Thus far, the film has earned a cool $100 million.

REACHING OUT

Before the official launch of the film, Donnersmarck took it to various audiences in the former East Germany. He wanted to assure them that this was not a film attacking them, or making fun of them; this was a film suggesting what life was like. From these audiences came an outpouring of recognition, affirmation, and gratitude. During the Q&A sessions, people would not so much ask questions as tell their own stories, about life under Communism, and the Stasi. Some of them said, "This is the first time I've even allowed myself to go back to these things, and to open up these memories."

Donnersmarck makes an observation: People were brought up to identify totally with the state; they may be slow to realize the extent to which they were victimized by that state.

In his newspaper column, Bill Buckley referred to *The Lives of Others* as a "holy vessel of expiation." And so it was, in part. Of course, not all East Germans, or former East Germans, were happy with it. Donnersmarck cites his main Stasi adviser, who congratulated him on getting the details right: but why did the main character have to be a traitor? Is that the only way to make a Stasi officer a hero—by having him betray the state?

Such a mentality is far from dead, in Germany and elsewhere.

Within the story of *The Lives of Others* and its making lies a particular, individual story: that of Ulrich Mühe, who played the lead role of Wiesler. As Donnersmarck relates, he was an extraordinarily sensitive man, as well as an extraordinarily good actor. Mühe had the fate of being an East German, and the Stasi had its eye on him from the moment he left high school: They knew he would be a big star. During his military service (obligatory), they made him serve as a sniper at the Berlin Wall. He was under orders to shoot whoever tried to cross from east to west. If he failed, he would never be allowed to work as an actor. He would have to be a manual laborer to the end of his days.

So there was Mühe, 18 years old, sitting in the towers, with this incredible burden on his shoulders. The only thing worse than not being an actor would be shooting someone. Mühe developed stomach ulcers, and one day he collapsed on duty, bleeding from the mouth. Doctors had to take out three-quarters of his stomach. But, fortunately, no one tried to cross. Still, the Stasi never stopped warning him to toe the political line, through all the years of his acting. He kept his counsel—until just before the Wall came down, when he gave a big, pro-freedom speech in East Berlin's Alexanderplatz.

After the Wall came down, Mühe did what few East Germans have wanted to do: He asked to see his Stasi file. It told him many ugly things, including this: His wife of six years, from whom he was divorced, informed on him for the duration of their marriage. She herself was a famous actress; she was also a Stasi spy, according to the file.

On discovering this, Mühe took a brave step: He spoke about it publicly. He wanted to tell his story, and perhaps give courage to others. When this was done, his ex-wife—with a battery of leftist, or "post-Communist," supporters—sued. She claimed that the information in the file was simply false. Perversely, Mühe lost the case. And there was more: Throughout this time, his ex-wife was sick, and, in fact, died. A certain public sympathy was with her. At her funeral, speakers denounced Mühe as a monster who had destroyed her. He was the object of widespread hate; his answering machine was filled with denunciations. And his own health worsened: Ulcers came to play on the quarter of a stomach he had left. Last summer, he died, age 54.

Needless to say, his friend and director, Donnersmarck, talks about all this with some passion.

FREEDOM AND TRUTH

What about Donnersmarck's politics? He is clear and direct: "I want the government to stay as far out of my life as humanly possible." His father was, and is, an anti-Communist, and a disciple of the economist Hayek. His mother was different: part of a socialist youth movement, early on. In college, they even called her "Red Anna." Donnersmarck says that he had the Cold War every night at his dinner table.

He has a frustration shared by many: the success of socialists in portraying the Nazis as diametrically opposite them. He says that people ought to be reminded that socialism was part of the Nazis' very name. He is against any system that forbids the individual to live his life to the full. And he is determined that Communism, in Europe and elsewhere, will not be perfumed.

"We must make sure to remember that it was a nightmare, because, as we know, ideologies do make cyclical reappearances. It's incredibly important that we don't allow people to romanticize Communism, and that we call it what it is: an anti-man religion, completely contrary to freedom." Go to the Eastern European countries, he says, and you will see the destruction wreaked by Communism: physical and spiritual. And he makes a point about the progress of formerly Communist countries: It has been delayed, because of a refusal to face up to the past. There has been no decommunization, as there was denazification. We are sternly warned against "victor's justice." And there has been precious little accounting.

Oscar Night 2007: Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck (l.) with actor Ulrich Mühe

TERRY SCHMITT/UPI

The Lives of Others might be considered a part of accounting—which is part of why it has been received so enthusiastically and emotionally.

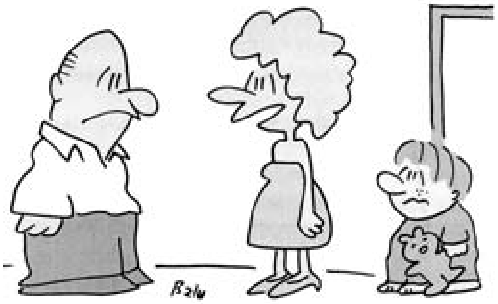
Reflecting on Communism, Donnersmarck remembers his years in Russia. He lived with architecture students, a civilized bunch. And they were content to live amid garbage, or at least willing to do so. Donnersmarck, the eager West German, suggested that they simply clean it up. They looked at him almost pityingly, saying, "Oh, you *would* say that, wouldn't you?" The sense that they could do anything on their own was utterly absent. They were dependent on the state.

For much of the world, Communism is no memory, and *The Lives of Others* was not distributed in at least two countries: China and Cuba. But there are plenty of bootleg copies about, certainly in China. Donnersmarck gets mail from Chinese intellectuals, saying, "Everyone has seen the film," underground. And this pleases the writer-director no end. "I don't think about all the money I'm losing in China, because I'm so glad the film is being seen. Thank God for piracy."

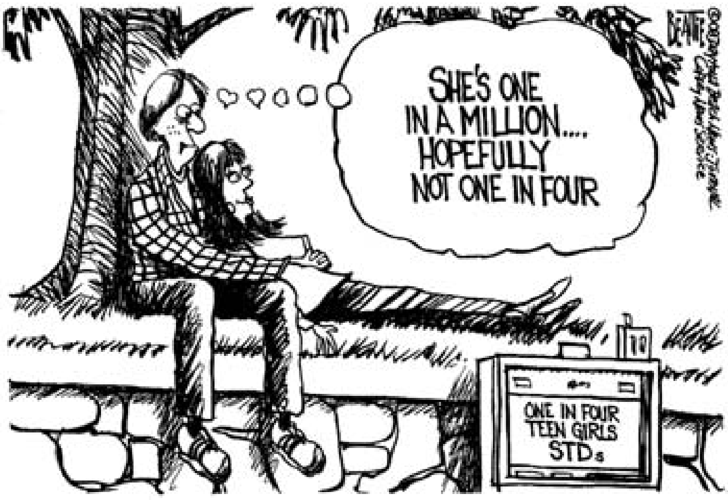
He is brimming with opinions, and I ask him about the United States. Donnersmarck says, in the course of his remarks, "I really, really hope that America will not make the mistake that has so weakened Europe: looking toward the government for answers to all problems. I hope that America will continue to respect the principle of subsidiarity, which is to say: The state should do only what the individual truly cannot do on his own"—and even then, the government that acts should be the most local government possible.

And what does he want for himself? "I hope to live my potential and develop my skills to the fullest. I hope that, in looking at my work, people will realize that truth lies within themselves. They should rely on themselves and take responsibility for themselves. I believe this so fundamentally, I'm sure it will be expressed in my films, whether I want it to or not, in whatever stories I tell." It should be a treat to follow those stories, year after year, in theaters everywhere: perhaps even in China and Cuba. **NR**

HELP!!!!



"He thinks Hillary Clinton is hiding under his bed."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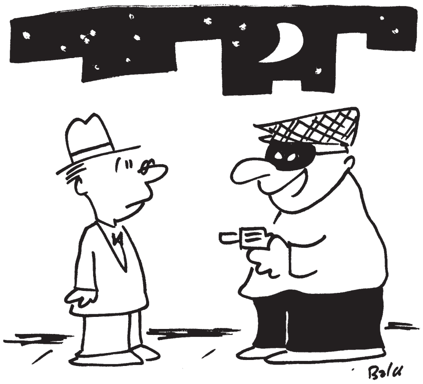
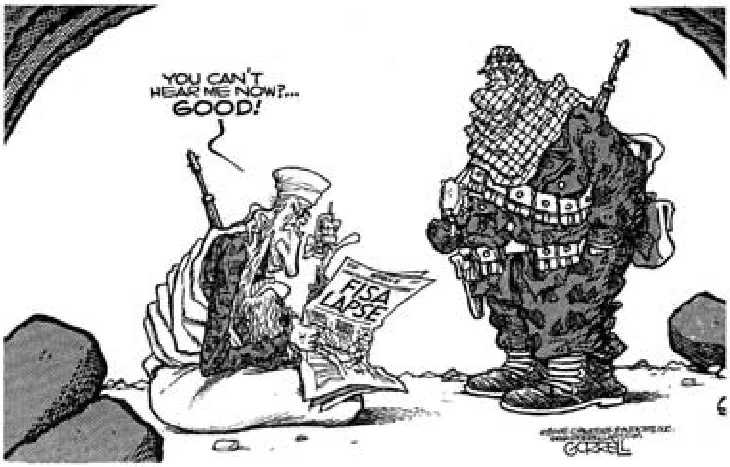
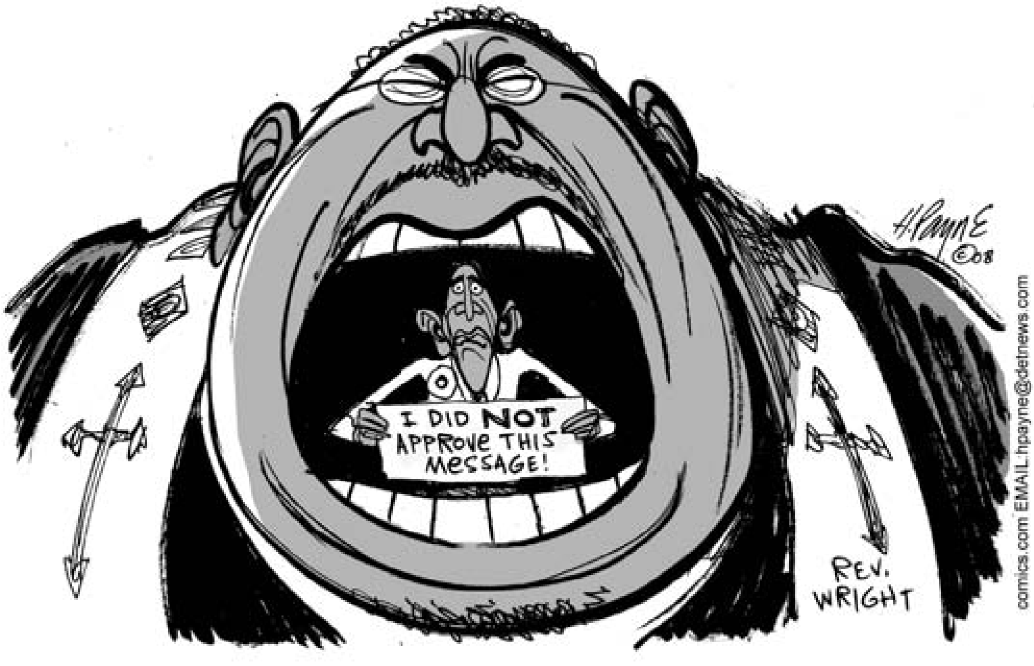
ONE IN FOUR TEEN GIRLS STDs
BEATTIE



"Okay, pal—time to give something back to the community."


YOU CAN'T HEAR ME NOW?... GOOD!
FISA LAPSE
GORRELL


I DID NOT APPROVE THIS MESSAGE!
REV. WRIGHT
HPAYNE ©08
comics.com EMAIL: hpayne@detnews.com

the long view

ROB LONG

Excerpts from:

The Collected Sermons of Jeremiah Wrighte, Parson of the Angry Lord Church of Somerstowne, Massachusetts 1775–1798, Informal Spiritual Adviser to Presidents and Governors.

January 22, 1775:

God ble*ff* America? More like, God Damme America, if thou asksest me.

Friends, we gather this Sabbath Day to worship the Lorde our Godde and condemn the Eville of the Kynge!

Right now, as we sit like Lambs, our Eville Kynge plots against us. Some of you, I cannot help but notice, have the Sniffles and the Gryppe—you cough and cough and cannot be Stille. Is this Poxe supposed to be a coincidence? Are we to believe that with all of our Knowledge and Progre*ff*, we still cannot fight off a deadly Scourge?

I'm not saying that the Kynge is responsible for introducing this Playgue upon us—well, acktually, I am saying that—but it seems mighty Fyshy, does it not, that just as we in the Commonweal are enjoying the beginnings of Progre*ff* and Succe*ff*, then bang, we all come down with the Gryppe?

It is our Gouvernement, our powerful so-called Lords and Masters, who have caused such Distre*ff*! It's a Conspiracee, obviously! When shalle we ryse up against them?

And also: Please don't forget the Bayke Sale. We're looking for Pyes and Sweetmeats of all kyndes. See Goody Wakefield if you have questions. Let us praye . . .

December 20, 1778:

We'll get to Christmasse in a moment. Firste, I'd like to talk a bit about the so-called War of Independence, currently being fought without oure Consent! How longe will this War last? So far, it's been a Faylure, a Quagmire! And for whom?

For the Power Structure, that's for whom! It's about Lyberty? Oh, really? I mean, Come onne! Lyberty? How do you figure that one?

When yr Little Ones are sick, do they get free Healthe Care? Doth the Docktor say, upon delivering the tonick, bleedynge, or cure, "Oh, this one's on the House?" No he doth not! He demands Monnaies! So how can we be free? What's wronge with our Countree?

I know what you're saying. Yr saying, Get on wyth it &c. Parson Wrighte! Stop talking politicks and start talking about Synne and Redemption and the Grace of our Lorde Godde!

Synne? Redemption? How can we be Redeemed when you see what we've done to the Indigenous Peoples of this Lande? We've treated them like Savages and Heathen, rather than as Orryginal Peoples who just happen to have a very different and no lesse valide "take" on the whole Creation mythe. Honestly, sometimes I thynke the Power Struckture doesn't understande why we are so Vexed and Angree.

On a Happyer note, I am most pleased to announce the Marriage of Parson Thomas Partridge to Mr. Joshua Weathertree. All synge their courageous and happye Union! (Not that it's offycially recognized by the Ydiots in Congre*ff*!)

Let us praye . . .

May 30, 1784:

My friends, we have muche to be thankful for. And as Sinners all, much to atone for. But first, some Announcements.

The Dyversity Committee shalle assemble in the Parishe Hall directly followynge this service. Such topicks as it shall address during this Assemblee shall include the continuing Care and Outreache to our Gaye, Lesbianne, and Transgendred &c. members, all of whom we cherishe and respeckt. We will also be tayking up the Issue of our Friends in Morrocco, who have been Provocked by our owne Arrogance into boarding and pirating an American quote unquote sailing vessel.

Oh, we're Americans now? So what does that make our neighbors in Canada? Or to the Southe?

We brought thisse upon our Selves! Friends, pray not for the Americans, but insteade for the brown-skinne of the Marock, who merely wish to challenge the Hegemonie of the American War Contraption!

Please also remember to sign uppe for Choir Practice! Let us praye . . .

October 14, 1798:

God ble*ff* America? Here we goe again! Our exclusively Whyte Male Leadershippe hath begun Sabre Rattling again! Are we to sail to war in a Distant Lande once more?

For the profit of the Big Compackts?

Worde hath it that they are making plans to attack the innocents in Northe Africka, for Cryme of Piracy. And where is the evidence of this Cryme? Pirates indeed. You know, oftimes it seems I should be more Worryed and Terryfyed by our owne Gouvernment than by any far-off so-called pyrate! The true pyrates are in Office!

And let's all thanke Goody Murdock for her magnificent Peace Quilte, which hangs this Sundaye in the Parish Halle, and which represents the Diversytie and Strenghte of our Congregationne. Truly, we are the Real Patryots!

Let us praye . . .

THE NATIONAL REVIEW

Sailing November 8–15 on

2008 Post-Election Cruise

Join **MITT ROMNEY, MARK STEYN, VICTOR DAVIS HANSON, BERNARD LEWIS, PAT TOOMEY, BRENT BOZELL, DEROY MURDOCK, ANDREW McCARTHY, KATHRYN LOPEZ, KATE O'BEIRNE, JAY NORDLINGER, BYRON YORK, JONAH GOLDBERG, RAMESH PONNURU,** and **JOHN J. MILLER**

as we visit Providencial, San Juan, St. Thomas, Half Moon Cay, and Ft. Lauderdale

Eurodam, Meodam, we'll all have seven d**n good nights aboard this beautiful ship in November!

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Fast forward to November 5th—the morning after. Whether you find yourself bemoaning four looming years of President Obama or Rodham (or, for some, worrying if President-Elect McCain will keep his promises to conservatives), or whether you're flabbergasted by how a bigger and badder Democrat-controlled Capitol Hill will handle policy (or: you're stunned that the GOP picked up seats!), make sure you're packing your luggage and preparing for the *Eurodam*, your floating luxury getaway for scintillating discussion of the elections and their consequences—and on all other major current events (including the state of the U.S. economy) and trends.

Spend the week of November 8th raking leaves and cleaning gutters. Or, spend seven sunny days and cool nights sailing the balmy tropics, mixing and mingling with the crew of exemplary speakers we've assembled to make sense of electoral matters and the day's top issues. To date confirmed speakers for *NR*'s **'Post-Election' Cruise** include former Massachusetts Governor **Mitt Romney**, best-selling author **Mark Steyn**, historian **Victor Davis Hanson**, Islam scholar **Bernard Lewis**, Club for Growth chief **Pat Toomey**, liberal media critic **Brent Bozell**, columnist **Deroy Murdock**, terrorism expert **Andrew McCarthy**, and from *NR* "Liberal Fascism" author **Jonah Goldberg**, NRO editor **Kathryn Lopez**, Washington Editor **Kate O'Beirne**, Senior Editors **Jay Nordlinger** and **Ramesh Ponnuru**, White House Correspondent **Byron York**, and National Political Reporter **John J. Miller**.

That's a great line-up that's sure to get *better* in the upcoming weeks (we'll keep you posted when new speakers sign on!).

As *NR* cruise alumni (there are thousands, the "typical" one has gone on four of our very *bon* voyages!) know, our trips are marked by riveting political shoptalk, wonderful socializing, intimate dining with our editors and speakers, making new friends, rekindling of old friendships—and, of course, grand cruising. That's what's in store for *you* on the ***National Review*** **2008 'Post-Election' Caribbean Cruise.**

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✔ Some of our most rewarding *NR* cruise experiences have been the informed interchanges between **Bernard Lewis** and **Victor Davis Hanson** on the brutal revival of the age-old struggle between Islam and the West. These academic giants—along with terrorism expert **Andy McCarthy**—will provide their razor-sharp insights on America's dealings in Iraq, the Middle East, and the Muslsim world.

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DAY/DATE	PORT	ARRIVE	DEPART	SPECIAL EVENT
Sat./Nov. 8	Ft. Lauderdale, FL		5:00PM	evening cocktail reception
Sun./Nov. 9	AT SEA			morning/afternoon seminars
Mon./Nov. 10	Providenciales, Grand Turk	7:00 AM	3:00PM	afternoon seminar late-night smoker
Tue./Nov. 11	San Juan, Puerto Rico	10:00AM	11:00PM	
Wed./Nov. 12	St. Thomas, USVI	8:00AM	5:00PM	evening cocktail reception
Thu./Nov. 13	AT SEA			morning/afternoon seminars late-night smoker
Fri./Nov. 14	Half Moon Cay	8:00AM	4:00PM	afternoon seminar evening cocktail reception
Sat./Nov. 15	Ft. Lauderdale, FL	7:00AM		

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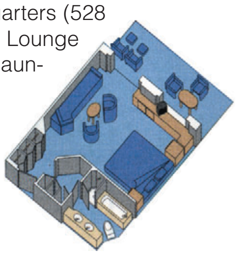
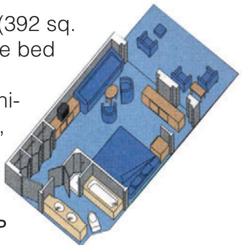
Ages infant to17: $599   Ages 18 and over: $1,059



DELUXE SUITE Magnificent luxury quarters (528 sq. ft.) features use of exclusive Neptune Lounge and personal concierge, complimentary laundry, pressing and dry-cleaning service. Large private verandah, king-size bed (convertible to 2 twins), whirlpool bath/shower, dressing room, large sitting area, DVD, mini-bar, and refrigerator.

Category SA

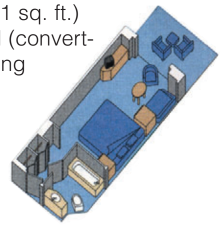
DOUBLE OCCUPANCY RATE:	$ 4,499 P/P
SINGLE OCCUPANCY RATE:	$ 7,999



SUPERIOR SUITE Grand stateroom (392 sq. ft.) features private verandah, queen-size bed (convertible to 2 twin beds), whirlpool bath/shower, large sitting area, DVD, minibar, refrigerator, floor-to-ceiling windows, and much more.

Category SS

DOUBLE OCCUPANCY RATE:	$ 3,499 P/P
SINGLE OCCUPANCY RATE:	$ 5,999



DELUXE OUTSIDE Spacious cabin (241 sq. ft.) features private verandah, queen-size bed (convertible to 2 twin beds), bath with shower, sitting area, mini-bar, tv, refrigerator, and floor-to-ceiling windows.

Categories VA / VB / VC

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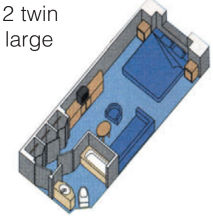

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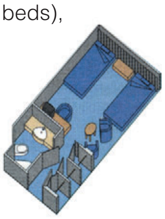

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books, arts & manners

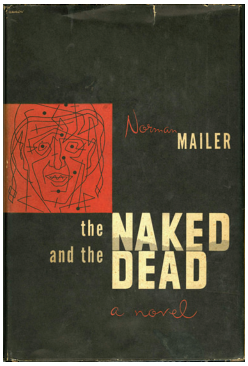
The Big Empty and a Silver Voice

M. D. AESCHLIMAN

NORMAN MAILER died in New York City in November 2007, about two and a half years after the death of Saul Bellow in Boston in April 2005. They were probably the two most prominent American novelists since World War II. At first sight, and at the beginnings of their careers especially, the two men had much in common. They represented the cultural "coming of age" of Jews in America and marked the succession of literary power from the Southern literary renaissance to the Jewish novel and sensibility. Both men went through early Trotskyite phases, and both were intermittently part of the *Partisan Review* circle: New York literary critics, mostly Jewish, who did much to promote their early work. Both writers had numerous wives, living through and documenting the sexual and emotional anarchy of the 1960s and after, which began for American intellectuals and academics with the Hip and Beat culture of the 1950s on the two coasts and in the universities. With long lists of publications, both writers died in their 80s.

But the contrasts between Mailer's and Bellow's lives, literary achievements, and legacies are more profound than their similarities and represent a longer distance than that between Mailer's New York and Bellow's Chicago.

Younger by almost a decade, Mailer was prominent earlier than Bellow, his World War II novel *The Naked and the Dead*—published in 1948, when he was 25—selling 200,000 copies in three months. Though Mailer had seen very little combat in the Pacific in World War II (in which he was a cook), the book was an auspicious beginning. Critic Charles McGrath notes that it "remains Mr. Mailer's greatest literary and commercial success." (It may be argued that Mailer was never to write so well again.) The book launched him into literary celebrity, but his two subsequent novels in the 1950s were unsuccessful with critics and readers alike. "For much of the '50s he drifted, frequently drunk or stoned or both," McGrath noted in the *New York Times* obituary; he "affected odd accents: British, Irish, gangster, Texan." In 1955, the same year William F. Buckley Jr. founded NATIONAL REVIEW, Mailer helped found the *Village Voice*, New York's avant-garde clarion of Hip and Beat existentialism, which increasingly became his obsession.



Mailer's first literary model, and the one he said was longest-lasting, was Ernest Hemingway, though for what John Berryman called Hemingway's "moral vacancy" Mailer substituted a passionate but incoherent blend of Nietzsche and Marx, of amoral vitalism and hypermoral leftism. Yet Hemingway's descriptive precision and moral minimalism, the eschewing of ideas and abstract nouns, were not Mailer's style. In 1957 he published an influential essay called "The White Negro," in which he applauded the murder of an aged white shopkeeper by two underclass black youths as a kind of brave emancipation. Here and elsewhere he glamorized criminal violence as "self-expression," the cultivation of the "flowers of evil" that had been pioneered by Sade and fostered by the 19th-century French *poètes maudits* and their diabolist 20th-century successors, the novelists André Gide and Jean Genet. In the native idiom Mailer's kinship with the bombastic egotism of Whitman and the sexual predation of Henry Miller intensified; increasingly, in the 1950s and '60s, he became an eager "connoisseur of chaos." In his life and work, he came to resemble the revolutionary immoralists in Dostoevsky's *Devils*: He was hungry for obscenity, violence, sadism, and apocalypse.

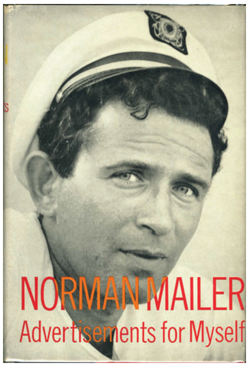
A constant theme from early on in Mailer's writing was the view that America was going fascist, though his own cult of violence reminds one of '20s Italian "Futurism" and Blackshirt gangsterism. Writing of Mailer in 1962, Diana Trilling took him to be the supreme representative of the "advanced writer of our time," for whom "the self is his supreme, even sole, referent." The apparently benign liberationist egotism of the promiscuous "imperial self" of Walt Whitman had borne iniquitous fruit in Mailer's behavior and writing. Mailer's novel *An American Dream* (1965) brought a new level of misogyny, sadism, and obscenity to mainstream fiction, building on and promoting the cynical immoralism and pornography of the one-time outsider Henry Miller, of whose works he edited an anthology and for whose greatness he made bombastic claims: "One has to take the English language back to Marlowe and Shakespeare before encountering a wealth of imagery equal in intensity."

Painful as it is to note, it is important to mention Mailer's increasingly intoxicated obsession not only with murder and transgression generally, but also with violent, sadistic heterosexual anal rape and the humiliation of women. As the critic Frederick Crews put it, Mailer and Miller were "above all" obsessed "with woman as fortress to be assaulted by the phallic battering ram." Mailer stabbed and seriously injured one of his own wives, who had to be hospitalized, and—as Norman Podhoretz has noted in his judicious portrait of Mailer in his memoir *Ex-Friends*—it may have been only Mailer's literary notoriety that kept him out of prison or the mental hospital. He was pioneering a new, pathological level of literary crudity and cruelty, one that from the '60s on opened the door to radical and libertine coarsening of our cultural life and the sensibilities of young people. Mailer's younger contemporary Allen Ginsberg, the *Village Voice*, and *Playboy* magazine were powerful allies

Mr. Aeschliman is professor of education at Boston University, professor of English at the University of Italian Switzerland, and author of *The Restitution of Man: C. S. Lewis and the Case Against Scientism.*

in the mainstreaming of this demonic, demotic, decadent betrayal of democratic and republican hopes for an "ethical culture." The result, a half century later, is the porn-riddled culture in which we must now raise our children and live our lives.

In one of Mailer's many "songs of myself," the aptly titled *Advertisements for Myself* (1959), he announced the ideological program that would dominate the rest of his life: "The sour truth is that I am imprisoned with a perception that will settle for nothing less than making a revolution in the consciousness of our time." Of course he was not alone in this effort, and was joined in the "high culture" by writers such as Gore Vidal and Truman Capote. By 1970, Kate Millett was (correctly) excoriating Mailer and Henry Miller as sadistic misogynists in her *Sexual Politics*. And by 1979, the historian Christopher Lasch was to depict Mailer as the prime example of "the culture of narcissism"; in the same year, the English journalist Tom Davies interviewed Mailer, calling him "America's leading romantic revolutionary" and telling him that he "had screwed up a countless legion of kids," including Davies himself.



On the model of the thrill-seeking anarchist Peter Verkhovensky in Dostoevsky's *Devils*, Mailer's program of "revolutionary consciousness" made noticeable gains, accelerating the coarsening of national life. By 1983 he was able to open *Ancient Evenings*, one of his late, interminably long novels, with a perhaps unintentional autobiographical characterization: "Crude thoughts and fierce forces are my state." As Whitman and others had hoped, the "genteel tradition" had been vanquished. The same novel continued the obsessive anal-penetration theme, the humiliating sodomization of women; for the importance of this practice, Mailer gave grandiose, ludicrous philosophical defenses worthy of Sade and Genet.

Mailer admired and praised the psychopathic "heroism" of convicted murderers Gary Gilmore, Charles Manson ("as an intellectual, he was brave"), and Jack Henry Abbott; to him, they were valuable cultural allies in the battle against the "suburbs" and "fascism." His efforts helped lead to the paroling of Abbott, an anthology of whose prison writings Mailer edited and successfully hyped; but as soon as Abbott was free on parole in New York City—just one day before the anthology was fulsomely reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review* ("awesome, brilliant, perversely ingenious")—Abbott killed again, this time a young waiter in an all-night restaurant. The English novelist Martin Amis called Mailer's introduction to Abbott's writings "shameful and ridiculous." Reviewing Mailer's *Executioner's Song* two years earlier, novelist Anthony Burgess was appalled by Mailer's "morbid, even rabid" fascination "with gratuitous abominations which give a meaning to terms like theological evil. Mailer . . . may need money to pay his multiple alimony, but he is selling out to something nastier than commerce."

From the early promise of *The Naked and the Dead* to the dismal, turgid verbosity of late novels such as the 1991 *Harlot's Ghost*—1,310 pages, concluding with the line "To be continued"; described by one critic as "screaming in pain for an editor," "bloated," "an abortion of a novel"—Mailer's career is a story of aesthetic and ethical decline in inverse proportion to public prominence. As Podhoretz pointed out, from about 1970 on most thoughtful people had long since stopped reading Mailer. For Mailer, normal Americans were either fascists or a freak show, like the exploited subjects of Diane Arbus's photographs. His last essay collection (2006) was called *The Big Empty*. It seems a particularly fitting epitaph for his life and literary career.

Saul Bellow had a much less propitious beginning than the upper-middle-class Mailer, who was born into comfortable affluence in the suburbs of New Jersey. Bellow was born in the slums of Montreal in 1915, the son of devout Russian-Jewish immigrants who had come to Montreal from St. Petersburg in 1913 and experienced great humiliation and poverty in the New World. At eight, Bellow nearly died of peritonitis and pneumonia, spending six months in the hospital; he much later said that ever after he felt an underlying sense of gratitude for surviving and of obligation to do something noble with his life. In 1924 the Yiddish- and Russian-speaking Bellows immigrated to Chicago, which was to be Bellow's home and the setting for much of his writing and thinking, though he also spent periods in New York, Boston, and Paris. The family's fortunes slightly improved, though the onset of the Depression in 1929 and his father's business reverses forced Bellow to withdraw from the University of Chicago in 1935. In 1937 he graduated with honors in anthropology and sociology from Northwestern University, and then began doctoral work in anthropology at the University of Wisconsin, but soon dropped out to teach and work in the Federal Writers' Project in Chicago.

During World War II Bellow published two stories in *Partisan Review* and—in 1944—his novel *Dangling Man*, which was praised by Edmund Wilson. Married and with a child, he moved to New York and enlisted in the Merchant Marine in 1945. In 1947 he published *The Victim*, a somber novel about life in New York City that had small sales but subtle integrity and already contained evidence of noble intentions, a refined sensibility, and an agile mastery of realistic fiction. An elderly Jewish immigrant character, Schlossberg, perhaps modeled on the Yiddish-American fabulist Isaac Bashevis Singer, gives a brief, witty, street-smart, but profound defense of human virtue, culminating in the assertion: "Have dignity, you understand me? Choose dignity. Nobody knows enough to turn it down." Bellow is already pioneering a distinctive style and approach, the interplay of a raffish, sardonic, topical, pop idiom of witty velocity with intermittent and profound philosophical meditations and underlying moral themes. Dostoevsky, whom he had begun to teach in the Pestalozzi-Froebel Teachers College in Chicago in the late 1930s, was clearly one of his masters, and would remain so throughout the career that would eventually earn Bellow a Pulitzer, three National Book Awards, a Presidential Medal, and, in 1976, the Nobel Prize.

Between 1947 and 1950 Bellow traveled in Spain and Austria and lived and wrote in Paris and Rome. Like another

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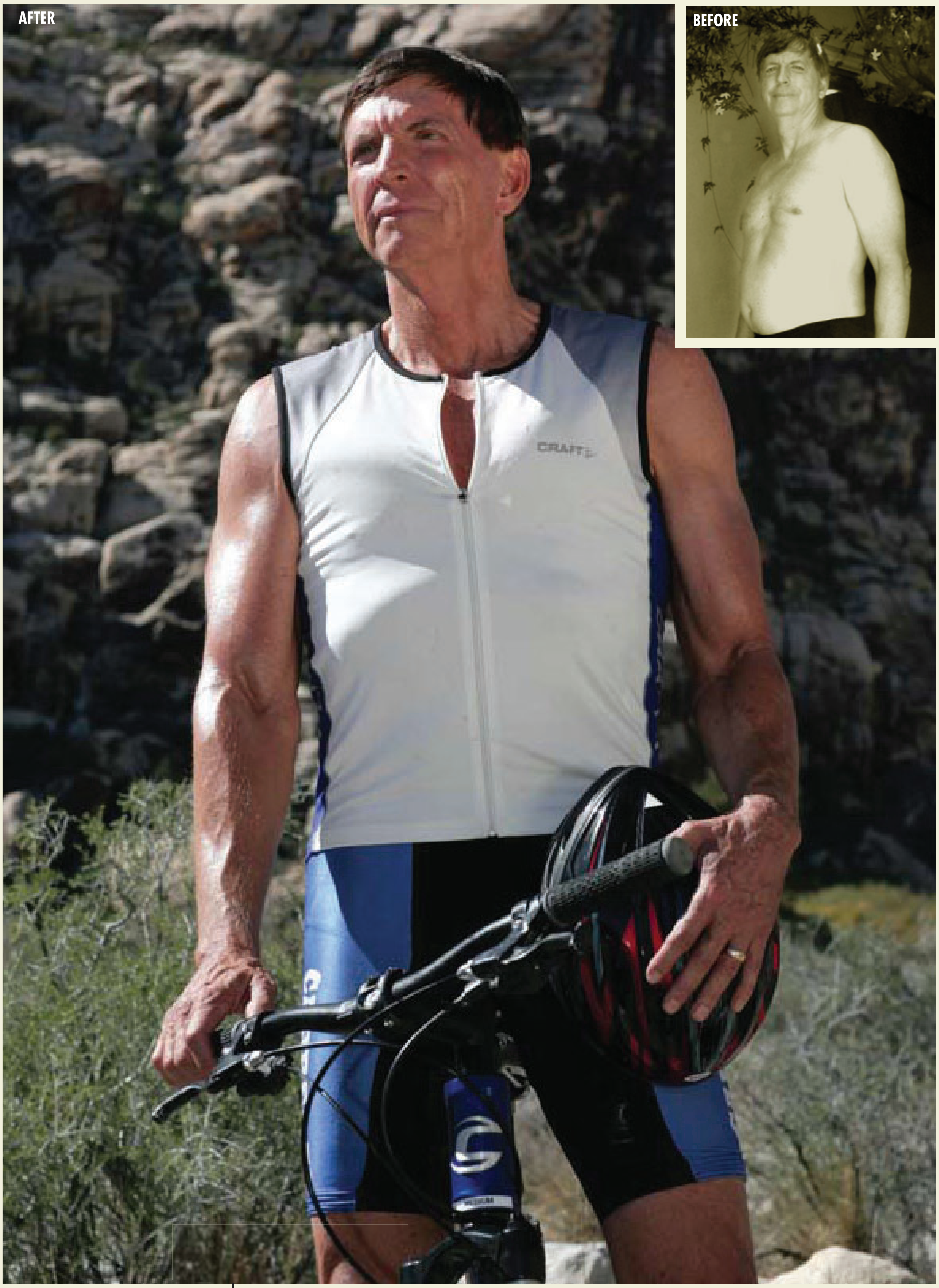

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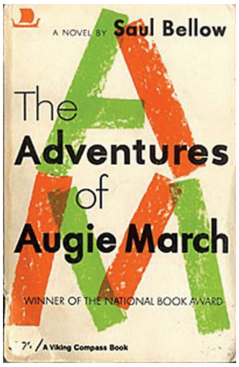
future Nobel Prize winner, the Polish émigré poet Czeslaw Milosz, Bellow was fascinated but appalled by the strange, perverse combination in French avant-garde intellectuals of nihilistic aestheticism, Stalinist conformity, and hatred of a U.S. that had very recently liberated France from Nazi occupation.

Though, throughout his long life, Bellow held up a mirror in his fiction to the frequent selfishness, crudity, materialism, and moral anarchy of modern American life, he was always steadily resistant to the "radical chic" anti-Americanism so blatant in the life and work of Mailer. Documenting America's moral anarchy and cultural disintegration, Bellow nevertheless realized that Americans had no monopoly on these ills. In an odd, subtle, but persistent basso continuo, Bellow was loyal to the spirit and residual momentum of American republican and democratic institutions as "the last, best hope of mankind," never forgetting the boiling European cauldron from which his parents had made their escape in 1913. One is often struck by the intelligence and justice of his mind, the growth of his sensibility, and his sense of the human condition—a sense evident as early as the immigrant Schlossberg's defense of "humanity" and "dignity" in *The Victim.*

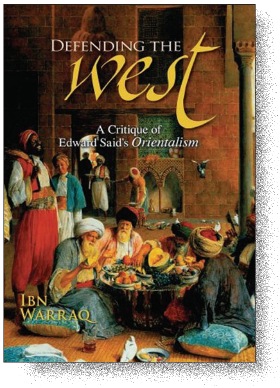

A NOVEL BY Saul Bellow
The Adventures of Augie March
WINNER OF THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD
A Viking Compass Book

Bellow's comic masterpiece *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) was the breakthrough that established him as the major voice in American fiction and, ultimately, in the words of more than one critic (including Martin Amis), the finest and most significant writer of English prose in the 60 years after World War II. The comic voice—sardonic and Jewish, with something of Gogol, Dickens, and Mark Twain—was to be Bellow's idiom in numerous works of rich inventiveness to follow. But it was steadily augmented and punctuated by philosophical seriousness of great eloquence and pathos: memories of childhood, religious piety, modestly understated patriotism, gratitude and loyalty to the family, repeatedly defeated hopes for marriage and lovingkindness, intimations of immortality (especially of a purgatory for vexed spirits such as his friends Delmore Schwartz, John Berryman, and Allan Bloom), and unflinching honesty about the Holocaust and the Gulag and the lesser but real evils of contemporary Western society. In a promiscuous, obscene, and violent age, Bellow's art had to display the anarchy, but—unlike Mailer and many others—he never collaborated with it or celebrated it to ride to fame and fortune. "If a way to the better there be, it exacts a full look at the worst," Thomas Hardy had written, and Bellow does not flinch from this obligation. But he deplores and seeks to undermine the perversion and profanity and chaos that he depicts, in the interest of what Orwell called "normal life and common decency"—while seeing that sense of normality and decency as ultimately rooted in Judeo-Christian piety and hope.

Perhaps the finest of Bellow's novels is *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), which he said was "wrung from me by the crazy '60s." It is both a depiction of the "upward psychopathic mobility" of Western culture—and especially of New York City—in the '60s and a bearing of witness to the dismaying spectacle of European history across the decades after 1914. More: It is an attempt to earn and distill moral wisdom from the cataclysm. Battered and scarred by the nihilism of Nazi-mutilated Germany, the aged Polish-Jewish refugee Sammler, "eaten by a longing for sacredness," eschews the psychopathic, histrionic "Coney Island of the mind" seething in the streets and bedrooms of New York City and its suburbs, "the confused and degraded clowning of this life," and affirms, in opposition, that "the spirit knows that its growth is the real aim of existence."

A lapidary passage in *Herzog* (1964) offers one of the great epiphanies in modern literature. Bellow, the ultimately pious American son of storm-tossed immigrants, left a moving, cautionary epitaph: "A merely aesthetic critique of modern history! After the wars and mass killings! You are too intelligent for this. You inherited rich blood. Your father peddled apples." **NR**

Put Paid To Said



Defending the West:
A Critique of Edward Said's
Orientalism, by Ibn Warraq
(Prometheus, 556 pp., $29.95)

ANTHONY DANIELS

A YEAR or two ago I went to an extremely interesting exhibition in Birmingham (England) of 19th-century paintings of blacks. To my great surprise and pleasure, it was curated very straightforwardly, without the intrusion of any political correctness.

Having viewed the exhibition, I looked at the books of visitors' comments, as is my practice wherever such a book is provided (I have been to more than one exhibition where the book of comments was by far the most interesting exhibit). On one page, two black women had inscribed their thoughts about the exhibition. The first thanked God that she had lived to see the day when black people were displayed so truthfully and sympathetically; the second deplored the unutterably racist nature of the pictures.

The first response was, in my opinion, much nearer the mark, and much less self-consciously ideological and therefore sincere. Apart from a certain condescending sentimentality of the noble-savage variety (by no means absent from the attitudes of the politically correct) discernible in some of the pictures, the artists portrayed their subjects as full and equal members of the human race. The second woman who

Mr. Daniels is the author of *Utopias Elsewhere* and other books.

wrote her opinion was under the influence, whether she knew it or not, of the late Edward Said.

Unfortunately, intellectual influence is not necessarily proportional to intellectual worth, especially in an age of celebrity and liberal guilt. Edward Said knew, consciously or unconsciously, how to achieve the first while playing on the second. His tragedy was that, in order to do so, he had to turn himself into a charlatan, the literary equivalent of a salesman of patent medicine.

His charlatanry is evident in his execrable prose, by means of which he disguises bad arguments and dishonesty by tortuous syntax and redundant polysyllables. His only writing known to me in which he approaches clarity is that which relates to music, a genuine passion of his that was free from ideological deformation. Said was a talented man for whom fame was more important than truth, and this will ensure that his work falls into well-merited oblivion, except as an example of egregious intellectual fashion. Sociologists of knowledge will long be interested in the rise to preeminent intellectual influence and power of so inconsiderable a figure.

In this book, the immensely erudite and clear-minded Ibn Warraq—the author of the celebrated and courageous *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, and independent scholar of Islam—refutes every point that Said made in his most famous book, *Orientalism*. Said believed that all Western writing about and pictorial representation of the Orient was but the intellectual justification, both before and after the fact, of colonial domination of the Middle East. This was necessarily so, because all people in the West—among whom, of course, Said chose to live—were inherently racist and demeaning of everyone but themselves. In Marx, the expropriators are expropriated; in Said, the essentializers are essentialized.

Some might say that Ibn Warraq has picked an easy target: Said's work would not have been worth refuting had it not been so phenomenally successful in creating what Auden called, with regard to Freud, "a whole climate of opinion." The literary problem that Ibn Warraq faces, therefore, is that too detailed a refutation might seem heavy-handed, an elephant squashing a gnat; on the other hand, a refutation that was not detailed enough might be deemed to have selected only a few errors for rhetorical purposes, leaving the outline of Said's argument intact. Ibn Warraq goes for the Carthaginian solution, leaving not a stone standing.

He has little difficulty in showing that there is practically no form of intellectual dishonesty to which Said did not stoop, from sins of omission to those of commission. Said misquotes or willfully misunderstands the authors to whom he refers; he omits many others either through ignorance or—worse still—because he knows that they would make his argument ridiculous.

In case after case, Ibn Warraq shows that the work of Western scholars was both disinterested and extremely respectful to its objects. Many Orientalists were the nationals of countries with no imperial possessions; moreover, scholarly interest in the Orient even in Britain and France, the principal imperial nations, long preceded the relatively brief period of imperial rule, and will long survive it. In any case, French and British Orientalists were frequently critics and opponents, not handmaidens, of the worst aspects of European imperialism.

Ibn Warraq uses the occasion of his refutation of Said to mount a full-scale defense of the intellectual and ethical traditions of the West. For all the manifold crimes committed by Westerners (each of them equaled, however, by the people of other regions), the fact remains that systematic curiosity about alien civilizations and cultures is, or was until very recently, a uniquely Western phenomenon. Not only did Western collections of the art and literature of alien lands long precede Western imperialism, but many imperialisms have existed that never collected anything: On the contrary, they devoted much more energy to destroying the artifacts of other cultures than to collecting, preserving, or studying them. The Islamic doctrine of jahiliyya, the total ignorance that preceded the advent of Mohammed and Islam, is not one that is propitious to cultural broadmindedness.

Ibn Warraq is an unequivocal fan of the Enlightenment, which I am not—though, like everyone else, I am a child of it. Unlike him, I do not think that Enlightenment principles will ever satisfy all human needs, or can provide a complete answer to the question of human ends. It is both man's tragedy and his glory that some of his questions are unanswerable.

On one occasion Ibn Warraq is slightly unfair to Said, when he objects to Said's use of the term "refined ignorance" as applied to Western Orientalism. I do not think this term is meaningless, as Ibn Warraq says that it is, or even particularly opaque, unlike much of what Said says; one could have a very refined knowledge of astrology, for example. Moreover, only a few pages later, Ibn Warraq quotes the early English Orientalist Simon Ockley without equal animadversion: "It is to be feared that the next generation will not only inherit but improve the polite ignorance of the present." What Ibn Warraq should have said is that Said wrongly applied the term to Western Orientalists, not that it was meaningless.

But this is a rather small point. *Defending the West* is, on the whole, a book of great learning, full of information that to most readers will be recondite, but that is nonetheless entirely relevant to its overall theme. Ibn Warraq has set out to provide a strict, and indeed overwhelming, refutation of Said's *Orientalism*, rather than an examination of why that trifling work should have had the influence it did (an interesting and important question in its own right). No one, except cultural historians, need ever read, let alone refute, Said again.

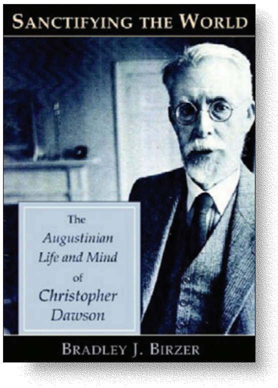
If I were a teacher of the humanities, however, I would give my students Said's *Orientalism* to read, and then Ibn Warraq's *Defending the West*, to demonstrate the difference between militant malice and erudition. **NR**

SNOWFLAKE

Timing's everything. The vapor rises
high in the sky, tossing to and fro,
then freezes, suddenly, and crystalizes
into a perfect flake of miraculous snow.
For countless miles, drifting east above
the world, whirling about in a swirling free-
for-all, appearing aimless, just like love,
but sensing, seeking out, its destiny.
Falling to where the two young skaters stand,
hand in hand, then flips and dips and whips
itself about to ever-so-gently land,
a miracle, across her unkissed lips:
as he blocks the wind raging from the south,
leaning forward to kiss her lovely mouth.

—WILLIAM BAER

The Full History



Sanctifying the World: The Augustinian Life and Mind of Christopher Dawson, by Bradley J. Birzer (Christendom, 300 pp., $30)

JAMES E. PERSON JR.

RUSSELL KIRK said that the modern conservative "is concerned, first of all, for the regeneration of spirit and character—with the perennial problem of the inner order of the soul, the restoration of the ethical understanding and the religious sanction upon which any life worth living is founded. This is conservatism at its highest." The spiritual and moral regeneration of Western man—the ordering of the soul and its relation to the ordering of the commonwealth—was also a central theme for the Welsh-born English historian Christopher Dawson (1889–1970), whose works markedly influenced Kirk.

Kirk first imbibed Dawson's thought through T. S. Eliot, whose *Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948) were strongly informed by Dawson. Eliot and Dawson had similar ideas on tradition, imagination, culture, and faith. Both were for a time the editors of influential periodicals of ideas, and each contributed occasionally to the other's magazine, Dawson to Eliot's *Criterion* and Eliot to Dawson's *Dublin Review*. For his part, Kirk wrote that his own understanding of Western history was the result of having been "saturated in Dawson's historical studies. . . . My own books reflect Dawson's concepts."

Mr. Person is the author of *Russell Kirk: A Critical Biography of a Conservative Mind* and *Earl Hamner: From Walton's Mountain to Tomorrow*.

Many other historical and philosophical scholars recognized Dawson, a traditionalist and Roman Catholic layman, as one of the preeminent historians at work in the 20th century, but in the years since Vatican II, Dawson has been strangely forgotten. In this new book, Bradley J. Birzer—historian and director of American studies at Hillsdale College—strives to restore Dawson's reputation. And he succeeds, demonstrating that, while Dawson was a relevant thinker who pressed for Western cultural renewal during the Cold War, he is equally relevant in the post-9/11 age.

Born into a devout Anglican household and educated at Oxford, Dawson was a child of the late afternoon of Queen Victoria's reign. This era was described by Chesterton as the time of the "the break-up of the compromise," a period when secularism, industrialism, and scientism largely overthrew Europe's lingering culture of Christian faith that had long held at bay the naturalist claims of Darwin and Comte. The idea of man as a being especially created and beloved by God gave way to the view that he is a cog in a vast machine: made not for eternity but for utility, useful until broken, and ultimately expendable. (This new age had been foreseen by Emerson: "Things are in the saddle, / And ride mankind.") Dawson lamented the passing away of what had long been called "Christendom" and recognized that, with the fading of faith in Britain and Europe, men would seek to fill the resulting void with one form or another of ideology.

Dawson recognized that, with the fading of faith in Britain and Europe, men would seek to fill the resulting void with one form or another of ideology.

Even as Dawson came to this realization, the buds of Fascism, Communism, and other ideologies were beginning to sprout. The world he had known was disappearing; and he determined as early as 1909 that his life's work would be the writing of a multi-volume cultural history of the world that would reflect the role of religion in the shaping of nations' cultures. This project would serve as both a reminder of what had once been and a challenge to conserve and restore.

His own faith, meanwhile, moved in the direction of Roman Catholicism. He embraced the ancient faith in 1913 and was received into the Church the following year. Within a short time he began writing his first magazine articles, which would lay the foundation for his life's work. Over the remaining half century of his life, Dawson—a careful writer—never fulfilled his ambition. But he did publish many articles and books—notably *The Making of Europe* (1932), *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (1933), and *Religion and Culture* (1948)—that, together, form at least the beginnings of the larger study he envisioned.

Certainly they form a history of Western culture that stands strongly at odds with H. G. Wells's 1920 *Outline of History*, which was massively influential throughout the Twenties. Wells saw history as the saga of mankind's rise from apelike beginnings and slow emergence toward an ever more godlike being. But, having seen the bloody fruits of nationalism in World War I, mankind now stood prepared, or so Wells thought, to recognize the need for an omnicompetent World State. Wells declared, "Our true God now is the God of all men." Of course, this amorphous deity would need earthly prophets: enlightened elites who know what's best for everyone.

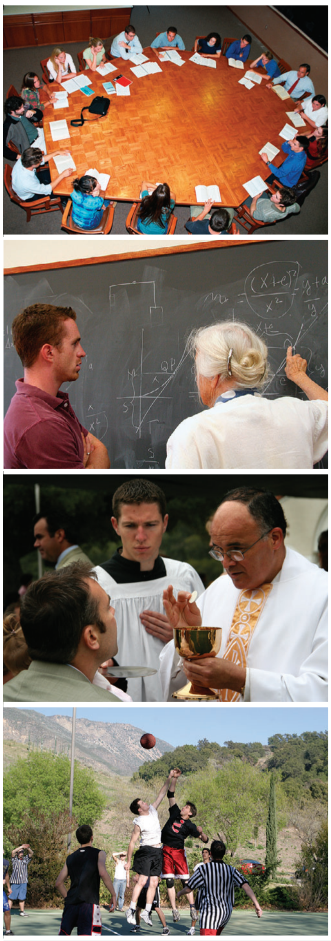
Dawson saw humanity and its history differently, as is evidenced in many of his works, including the one Birzer deems his best, *The Judgment of the Nations* (1942). Dawson recurrently addresses the question: What does it mean to be a human being? What is man's end, and how ought he to live—especially in the age of a Planning Elite? In an unsigned review of *The Judgment of the Nations* published in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Dermot Morrah wrote, "The scientific and other forces that have compelled society to think constantly in terms of the mass cause us all to accept the idea of ever more complete planning. But planning tends only too easily to totalitarianism; and the reason, according to Mr. Dawson, is that in the secular state it always concerns itself with riches or power, which are means, and not with the destiny of the soul, which is the end."

Just so. Or, as Birzer writes, Dawson "feared that almost every aspect of modernity attempted to mechanize the human person, making him less than God intended him to be." Like Augustine, Dawson saw man as a being created and beloved by God, but flawed by sin. Man's nature is not entirely fleshly and not entirely spiritual, but a mysterious blending of the two. By embracing Christ and his Church, Augustine and Dawson held, man enters into a right relation with God and becomes, so to speak, a bridge for others to enter into that same relationship.

The Christian, Dawson believed, sanctifies the world by his witness and his work, which is suffused with integrity, curiosity, imagination, and creativity—a reflection of the creative Divine: The person of faith redeems the time. Within this new fellowship, men attain the wisdom of knowing that, while they must live in the City of Man, which will in time decay and fail, they are also citizens of the City of God, which endures.

The horrors wrought by 20th-century ideology led many to discount what little faith they had in the City of God's existence. "Can you believe, God makes you breathe? / Why did he lose six million Jews?" asked Greg Lake in Emerson, Lake & Palmer's sardonic hymn "The Only Way" some 30 years after the Holocaust: a sentiment that would seem to reflect more upon man's own appalling choices and capacity for cruelty amid his glorious "ascent" than upon the question of God's existence. Dawson did not shy from confronting the eternal questions that arise in the aftermath of pogroms, police-state regimentation, and other blots upon the history of both religious and ideological cultures. "Even at the worst moments of history—whether the Vandals' sacking of Rome or the ideological atrocities of the mid-20th century—the human person can call on divine help, Dawson believed," writes Birzer. "With Soviet tyranny and oppression in Poland, Dawson wrote in the middle of the Cold War, the spiritual element allowed the Poles and other Eastern Europeans 'to survive.'"

Dawson knew something the whole



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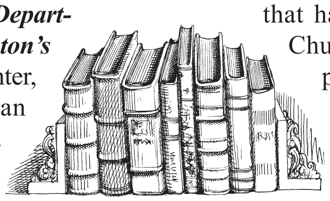
world would learn in 1989: that “the forces that appear to make human civilization so irresistible—its wealth, its economic organization, and its military power—are essentially hollow, and crumble to dust as soon as the human purpose that animates them loses its strength.” Dawson held that all culture arises from the cult—from the religious belief systems adopted by communities of men in specific times and locales.

Further, Dawson believed that history is not simply a series of accounts of human conflict as told by the winners, but is instead the working out of God’s mysterious design on earth, only fitfully discerned as such. Man works out his salvation on earth through the agency of the Church, through the communities in which he lives, and through imagination: what Plato called “divine madness”—a mind beside itself—which allows one to order his soul properly. As Joseph Pearce (author of the appreciative and intelligent introduction to Birzer’s book) said on one occasion, imagination enables us to begin to enter into the mind and experiences of others, upon which the Golden Rule—“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”—is predicated. The effect of imagination is to deepen one’s understanding of the larger world outside one’s own head.

In highlighting the importance of imagination to Dawson’s historical thinking, Birzer has performed a signal service to the better understanding of Dawson’s thought. And in this work as a whole, the author has succeeded in crafting a superbly researched and convincing intellectual and spiritual biography. **NR**

■ SHELF LIFE ■

In 1935, a simple declaration by the cardinal archbishop of Boston was enough to doom what was otherwise a very popular bill establishing a state lottery. In Massachusetts today, a majority-Catholic state legislature defies the leadership of the Catholic Church even on crucial moral issues. What on earth happened to Boston Catholicism? In ***The Faithful Departed: The Collapse of Boston’s Catholic Culture*** (Encounter, 272 pp., $25.95), veteran Catholic journalist Philip F. Lawler does an excellent job getting to the bottom of how this breathtaking transformation took place.



Many view the recent priest-sex-abuse scandals as a central cause of Catholicism’s loss of moral credibility in Massachusetts. Lawler, however, sees the causality flowing in the opposite direction:

> The sex-abuse scandal . . . was not only aggravated but actually *caused* by the willingness of Church leaders to sacrifice the essential for the inessential: to build up the human institution even to the detriment of the divine mandate. . . . From the first days of the Catholic ascendancy, Church leaders in Boston experienced the temptation to build up that influence and power for their own sake, rather than nurturing the religious solidarity on which they depended. Cardinals became preoccupied with the needs of the archdiocese as a secular institution, sometimes even to the detriment of the archdiocese as a community of faith.

Lawler gives chapter and verse on the bishops’ failures of religious leadership that have eroded the Catholic Church’s standing. There is perhaps too much in this book about the sex scandals, but the author is careful throughout to portray the bishops’ misconduct in that area as part of their much broader pattern of religious negligence. *The Faithful Departed* is a scorching indictment, but it concludes on a hopeful note:

> For the Catholic Church in Boston today, there is no earthly hope. . . . Fortunately, this situation is not new. The Catholic Church has never had any earthly hope. . . . Our first task is to take stock. . . . Above all else, we must recognize when we are relying on human strengths and earthly resources, and ignoring the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is good advice—and not just for Catholics.

—MICHAEL POTEMRA

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■ **FILM** ■

March Mischief

ROSS DOUTHAT

T. S. Eliot picked April, but as far as moviegoers are concerned, March is the cruelest month. The weeks immediately after the New Year are the traditional dumping ground for the worst of Hollywood's dross, but unless you're a critic (or a true obsessive), you probably won't have kept up with the flood of highbrow films that get released en masse at Christmastime, and you can spend the depths of winter catching up, ignoring the new releases, and prepping for the Oscars. It's the period between the Academy Awards and Easter when things get really grim, with movies that aren't so much laugh-out-loud bad as persistently mediocre: unsuccessful star vehicles, middling romantic comedies, blockbusters that didn't make the summertime cut, and art-house films that left the critics cold.

If audiences are lucky, though, there's the occasional gem scattered in amid the fool's gold. (I mean the metaphorical sort of pyrite, though last month's lousy Kate Hudson–Matthew McConaughey film, *Fool's Gold*, fits the bill as well.) This year's pleasant March surprise comes with a pleasantly direct title: A heist movie called *The Bank Job*, it's a solid, fast-moving, nuts-and-bolts caper set in 1970s Britain. And it's something more interesting as well—a speculative account of one of the Western world's weirder true-crime stories, and a coarse, violent, sexy entertainment with a thread of right-wing populism running through it.

Here are the facts that give the film its "based on a true story" jumping-off point. On September 11, 1971, a gang of thieves tunneled into a Lloyds Bank branch in London and made off with the contents of dozens of safe-deposit boxes. A ham-radio operator overheard their walkie-talkie conversations, and for four days the "walkie-talkie robbery" was the talk of the London press; then the government slapped a "D-Notice" on the media, requesting a halt to further coverage for reasons of national security. Several of the robbers were eventually arrested, while others apparently got away, but to this day nobody knows why the media blackout was imposed—except, perhaps, for one George McIndoe, who claims to have met the robbery's ringleader and learned that the heist turned up photos of Princess Margaret, that era's black-sheep royal, participating in a Caribbean orgy.

McIndoe has a producer's credit on *The Bank Job*, which spins a complex, outlandish, and wildly entertaining conspiracy theory from his piece of (supposed) inside information. In the movieland version of the story, the photos in the vault belong to the black-power hustler Michael X (Peter de Jersey, striking just the right balance between fraud and menace), who pals around with John Lennon and other radical-chic poseurs while using the pictures to blackmail the British government and escape prosecution for extortion. To snatch the photos without calling any attention to itself, Her Majesty's Government decides to mastermind a bank robbery, which MI5 or MI6—"I can never tell them apart," one of the movie's cops remarks—outsources to a collection of working-class stiffs led by Terry Leather (Jason Statham, stubbled and bullet-headed), a used-car dealer and former small-time crook.

The Bank Job's Terry (Jason Statham) and Martine (Saffron Burrows)

LIONSGATE

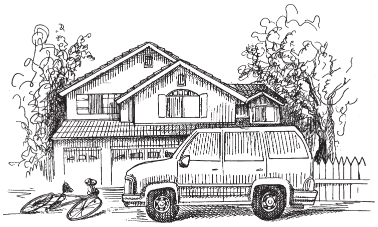
The go-between for this outlandish scheme is the lissome Martine (Saffron Burrows), the girlfriend of an MI5/6 man (Richard Linton) and the ex-girlfriend of one of the would-be bank robbers. (She also happens—naturally—to harbor a long-simmering crush on the happily married, easily tempted Terry.) The initial obstacle is the cops of Scotland Yard, who of course have no idea that the robbery they're attempting to investigate has been authorized at the highest levels of the government. But the more dangerous complicating factor is Lew Vogel (David Suchet, the BBC's Poirot), the "porn king of Soho" and a pal of Michael X, who keeps his ledger of payoffs and his collection of incriminating photos of brothel-frequenting politicos in the bank vault, and who's willing to go to great and bloody lengths to get his property back.

These are quite a few balls for a cops-and-robbers movie to keep up in the air, particularly when you throw in the frequent cutaways to Trinidad, where Michael X has fled. But Roger Donaldson, the old-pro director, does a fine job of keeping things moving briskly without going so fast that the audience loses track of who's double-crossing whom. The low-budget robbery, all jackhammers and blowtorches and underground tunnels, makes a welcome contrast with the glossy, high-tech turn that Hollywood heist flicks have taken lately. After the remakes of *Ocean's Eleven* and *The Italian Job*, it's nice to see a group of thieves who don't seem to be bankrolled by Microsoft and supplied by DARPA. And the casting is exactly right: a mix of unknowns, semi-knowns, and B-list headliners, with Statham and Burrows—who might both be A-list stars if his persona weren't quite so cockney and her beauty weren't quite so unusual—each turning in great work.

There are dissonances: The comic, amateur-hour charm of the robbery jars a bit with the turn the movie's third act takes, as the gang's stumblebum antics give way to torture and murder under Lew Vogel's chilly gaze. But the movie's kitchen-sink approach ultimately rewards the audience with a panoramic yarn that feels a bit like a Charles Bronson film written by Tom Wolfe. The villains are porn kings and corrupt cops, radicals and their celebrity enablers, and decadent toffs; the working-class heroes, meanwhile, get to save the honor of the British Crown and pick up a few hundred thousand quid along the way. Not bad for a gang of raffish amateurs, and perfect for a March movie. **NR**

■ **THE STRAGGLER** ■

A Rumor Of Angels



JOHN DERBYSHIRE

We are five: Dad, Mom, daughter, son, son's friend. The kids have reached the age where they would rather be boiled in oil than be seen in company with their parents, so on this ski lift, with seats three across, all three of them pile into the chair ahead of us, leaving Mr. and Mrs. Straggler to take in a single.

The single is a young lady of six or seven, wearing a pink ski suit and a helmet with one of those 1960s slightly weird flower designs. Her name, she tells us, is Katy. I explain to Katy that I am an occasional and incompetent skier, liable to take a fall when disembarking from the first ski lift of the day, so she should steer away from me. Katy bestows a withering glance on my ski poles (she, of course, having none). "I *never* fall," she announces, with that invincible self-possession that peaks at around Katy's age and declines through life thereafter.

In the event I disembark smoothly, and commence a day of skiing. The skill quickly comes back, though it's been a year since our last family ski trip. Skiing is one of those pastimes—like ten-pin bowling or skeet shooting, but unlike swimming or tennis—that is pleasurable even at a low level of ability. A sedentary and ill-coordinated person, I can ski for pleasure, but swim only for survival.

The late founder of this magazine skied for close to half a century, and of course wrote eloquently about it. One of the first columns of his that I read—it dates from November 1975—was in praise of the book *We Learned to Ski*, by Harold Evans et al. I was not a skier at the time and had no interest in the subject, but could not resist the Master's prose, nor help admiring a man who had already been skiing for 21 years yet was still a keen reader of skiing textbooks. (Of those prior to the Evans book, Bill had no high opinion: "What is . . . ignored in textbooks on skiing is usable material on how to ski.") I have never read a ski book nor taken a lesson. I suppose I should do the one or the other, or both, but it hardly seems worthwhile for such occasional outings. And then, something about old dogs and new tricks.

Our family ski trips are, like the rest of our lives, conducted on a modest suburban scale. A friend boasts of having been helicoptered to the summit of a peak in the Andes, to ski down for hours through long miles of virgin powder. I have no such boasts. These busy northeastern resorts are all I know, and I am happy with them. The ingenuity and efficiency with which they cater to time-starved suburbanites is comforting evidence that a civilized mass society is possible. I get the same consolation from supermarkets, which I can walk around happily for hours, and courts of law, and the cheery clamor of events at my kids' schools.

Ski resorts offer comforting evidence that a civilized mass society is possible.

Having skimped on my preparatory exercises in the weeks before our trip, I find my leg muscles are protesting uncomfortably by late afternoon. The kids have long since gone to explore the farther trails—the ones farthest from Dad and Mom, that is. I apologize to Mrs. Straggler and head for the dining hall, to settle with a book and a cup of hot chocolate.

The place is half empty, the lunchtime crowd long gone. I select one of the less messy tables and take out my book. It is Lionel Tiger's *Optimism: The Biology of Hope*:

> How does one develop, on one hand, a healthy skepticism about the possible outcome of events and, on the other, an openness to what Peter Berger has called a "rumor of angels"?

A young woman comes to wipe my table. Her name tag bears a common Hungarian surname. Guessing she is an H-2B (that is, a bearer of a seasonal-guest-worker visa), I offer her a greeting in that language, of which I know a few tourist's phrases. She is delighted, and favors me with a stream of animated Hungarian. Of course I can't understand a word.

We switch to English. She is indeed an H-2B, a student from Transylvania. I passed through that region once, a couple of decades before Miss Nagy was born, and we trade Transylvanian reminiscences till she is called back to the serving counter. For a while I sit there sunk in memories of my *Wanderjahre* while savoring the glow that a man—any man, even an incurably married old guy—gets from the attentions, however brief and accidental, of a pretty young woman. Do they have skiing in the Carpathians nowadays, I wonder? I forget to ask. Back to my book.

An hour later, sufficiently recuperated, I go back out to find my family. It is dark now. Only two trails are floodlit, the others have closed. There are few skiers, and I soon spot my wife, the only one on her trail. Why don't people like night skiing? I find it magical.

Husband and wife ski together under the crystalline Catskills sky. I indulge myself in fantasies of being a Finnish defender in the Winter War of 1939–40, when peasants on wooden skis fought Stalin's army to a draw. ("We've won just enough land to bury our dead," muttered a Soviet commander at the war's end.)

Later, heading back home, we pull into a McDonald's for supper. An eclipse of the moon has begun as advertised, so we stop in the parking lot to watch it. I make my customary joke about how a great dog is eating the moon, and we should bang pots and pans and let off firecrackers to scare it away. Mrs. Straggler, who takes this as demeaning to her native land, clicks her tongue in annoyance. The kids grimace at the staleness of parent humor.

The great shadow advances. We watch in silence for a minute or two, even the kids. The outcome of this event, at least, is not in doubt, is foreordained by huge mathematical equations, leaving no room for skepticism. After some interval precisely known to those who know, the shadow will pass, and all will be well, all will be as before. A rumor of angels. **NR**

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MARK STEYN

States of the Mindless

THERE was a sad little interview in the *New York Times* the other day. Carmen Peláez is a playwright and, therefore, a liberal, but she’s also a Cuban-American, and she was a little disappointed in her ideological soulmates’ reaction to her latest play. *Rum & Coke* examines in part the West’s cultural fascination with Castro and the revolution that time forgot. You know the sort of thing—the Che posters decorating the Obama campaign offices in Houston; Michael Moore’s paean to Cuban health care, though it doesn’t seem to have worked out so great for Fidel. The enduring sheen of revolutionary chic is in forlorn contrast to the decrepitude of the real thing. “When I started writing the play, I thought people just didn’t know what was happening in Cuba,” Miss Peláez told the *Times*. “But the longer I live here, the more I realized, they don’t care. . . . They would rather keep their little pop revolution instead of saying it is a dictatorship. I had somebody come to me after a show and say, ‘Don’t ruin Cuba for me!’ Well, why not? They’re holding on to a fantasy.”

“Don’t ruin Cuba for me” the way the Vietnamese ruined Vietnam for Tom Hayden. The old leftosaurus went back for the first time in 32 years to see the country he and his then-wife, fair Hanoi Jane, had saved for Communism. Alas and alack, he found the ingrate natives in the midst of a capitalist frenzy. It’s been like that awhile on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. A few years back in South Kensington, I ran into Mrs. Thatcher’s daughter Carol looking for a taxi to Heathrow. This was in the grey days following the Conservatives’ act of matricide, when the Iron Lady’s wan successor, John Major, was trying to keep the party’s ramshackle show on the road. “I’m off to Hanoi,” said Carol, cheerily. “It’s a boom town. These Vietnamese chaps seem to have got the hang of capitalism a lot better than the Tories.” As he glumly informed readers of *The Nation*, Tom Hayden did not enjoy hearing his old revolutionary chums regaling him with a lot of stuff about GDP per capita: Don’t ruin Vietnam for me.

Only we may ruin Vietnam.

AP

“Pop revolution” is a fine coinage. Pop stars have been peddling revolution for nigh on half a century, and they’re still doing it. At the Live 8 all-star gala for Africa a couple of years back, Madonna urged us to “start a revolution.” Like Africa hasn’t had enough of those? Along with her fellow members of the aristorockracy, Madonna lives in a whirl of hyper-capitalism—agents, managers, lawyers, accountants, publishers, all tussling over rights to her songs, her children’s books of recent years, her sex book of earlier years with the nude photographs of her bottom hanging over the garden wall while a gay black dance troupe cavorts below with a German wolfhound, her digitally remastered mouthwash gargles . . . For a quarter century, every aspect of Madonna’s life has been lawyered up to the hilt and leveraged to the max. In real revolutions, the mob rises up, pillages the CD factory, torches your inventory. Royalty statements become optional and occasional. All a bit of an inconvenience frankly. Still, if you can hold the revolution somewhere else, I’ll certainly wear the T-shirt. And, anyway, where’s the harm in it for Somalia or Congo? When you ain’t got nothing, you got nothing to lose. Don’t ruin Africa for me.

“They’re holding on to a fantasy,” says Carmen Peláez. But, once a fantasy’s taken hold, it’s hard to dislodge. On the fifth anniversary of the Iraq War, 55 percent of Iraqis polled by ABC and the BBC said their lives are going well. True, 73 percent of Kurds and 62 percent of the Shiites reckon things are swell, compared with only 33 percent of the Sunnis, but that’s what happens when you spend the first few years after liberation pining for the *ancien régime*. Did that poll get a lot of play in your local paper? Didn’t think so. Don’t ruin Iraq for me. The Code Pinkers at Berkeley know it’s a Bush quagmire, even if the Iraqis don’t.

What is Iraq? What is Vietnam? What is Cuba? Well, each is a state, but it’s also a state of mind—or mindlessness. These are real places where real people live, real Iraqis and Vietnamese and Cubans, but they’re vague and amorphous, like the anonymous natives in the British Empire yarns of my boyhood, disposable extras filling out the background and only rarely getting to play a scene with a star—as when Cameron Diaz was obliged to apologize to the citizens of Peru for swanning about Machu Picchu with an attractive designer bag bearing a red star and the Maoist slogan “Serve the People.” Unfortunately, the last time a bunch of Maoists showed up in the Andes, it was the Shining Path guerrillas, and instead of serving the people they slaughtered them, 70,000 or so.

Well, what do the Peruvians know, or the Vietnamese, the Cubans, any of them? Don’t ruin the frisson of vicarious revolution for me. Meanwhile, the careless disdain for the peasantry gets closer to home. The archbishop of Canterbury says the introduction of sharia is inevitable in the United Kingdom, which is a tough break not just for those Brits who believe in quaint concepts like common law, but also for Muslims who left their moribund homelands in search of free societies unencumbered by Islamic jurisprudence. Don’t ruin Britain for me? Hey, sometimes radical transformation isn’t just for T-shirt slogans. **NR**

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